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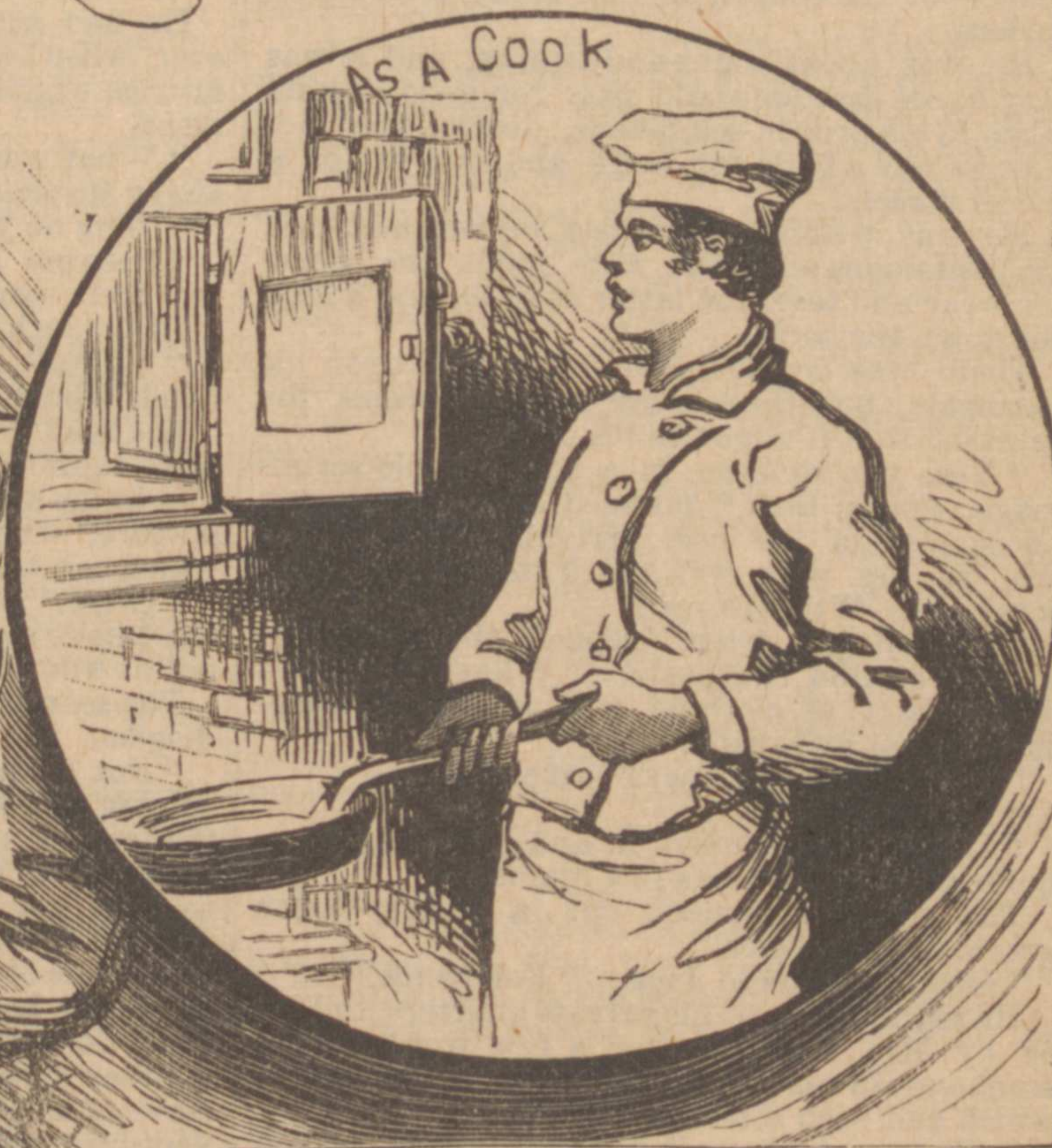
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Vol. LIII.

THE ON-THE-WING DETECTIVES



BOLLY BLAIR



THE ON-THE-WINGS EN CHARACTER.

OR,

Bolly Blair's Grand Exposition.

A Romance of Chicago and the Dep-
worth Millions.

BY LEON LEWIS,

AUTHOR OF "THE SUBMARINE DETECTIVE,"
"THE SILENT DETECTIVE," "DAREDEATH
DICK, KING OF THE COWBOYS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE BUMBOATER'S STRANGE GUEST.

"HAVE another drink, Mr. Slatterly," in-
vited Black Jack, shoving a bottle nearer.
"No, thank you, Cap'n Yattaw," returned the
policeman. "I'm one of the few men who know
when they've got enough. You'll be in court at
ten o'clock?"

Black Jack nodded.

"This is the eighth time I've arrested you,
cap'n," pursued Slatterly, looking into the dark,
striking face of the famous bumboater, "and I
must say it's a pleasure to deal with such a gen-

tleman. You're the only man in the world whose word I'd take for going into court alone when he knows he's wanted."

"That's because I'm innercent," returned Jack, dryly.

"Then you didn't hit the Eytalian?"

"Not a bit of it."

"It's none the less a curious case. But of course you'll come out all right, as you allers do, and I hope you may."

"Thank you, officer. Drop in any time. I shall always be glad to see you."

Nodding his thanks, Slatterly stepped briskly from the bumboat to the pier and in another moment was losing himself to the view of his entertainer.

"Not a bad fellow," muttered Black Jack, turning to his wife. "What a pity that more of his kind are not like him!"

Jack had scarcely resumed the task of clearing up his strange craft from the orgies of the previous night when an exclamation from his wife, who was looking lakeward through a glass, fixed his attention.

"What now?" he inquired.

"Yonder comes a queer-looking scarecrow in a small boat I noticed when it rounded the outer end of the breakwater a few minutes ago," exclaimed Mrs. Yattaw. "The man has been in trouble."

"Sure enough," agreed Jack, after a glance at the new-comer through his glass, "and I think he is coming here for repairs."

"Or because we happen to be the first persons within reach, Jack."

The occupant of the boat had been rowing with desperate energy ever since rounding the breakwater, and in another minute he was alongside the bumboat.

"Come aboard, sir," invited Jack, lowering a short flight of steps and lending a hand.

"Thank you," returned the stranger, and a brief mutual effort landed him near the husband and wife.

And what a picture he was!

Both eyes were discolored, and one of them so much swollen as to be nearly closed, while his face was a mass of scratches, many of them so deep as to have bled freely, and there was a slit half an inch long on the top of one of his ears.

"You've been in a fight," blurted Jack.

"And with a woman, too," declared Mrs. Yattaw, with intense curiosity.

The stranger was visibly confused by the glances of the couple, as well as by their declarations.

He was about eight-and-twenty, and it was easy to see that he would pass for good-looking when in his proper semblance, despite the fact that he was a little too large and coarse for a model athlete.

He was without coat, vest, or hat, and both his pantaloons and shirt were much the worse for wear and tear, the latter even having a long slit down the back.

There was considerable blood, too, upon his garments, but there were ample reasons for thinking that it might be his own.

"Yes, you've been in a considerable scrimmage, young man," pursued Jack, continuing his survey of the new arrival. "With a gal, too, as my wife was quick to see by those scratches. Who are you?"

"I'll tell you later," replied the unknown, looking around nervously. "What I want first is a change of clothing, with a hat, and something to eat and drink."

"Have you any money?" asked Jack.

"Plenty, sir."

"Let me have some of it, and I can make you quite at home here in a few minutes."

The stranger handed out a twenty-dollar greenback in silence.

"Good," muttered Jack. "Follow me."

He led the way to his private quarters, followed by Mrs. Yattaw, after a few words to an employee in regard to the work of renovation which had been thus interrupted.

"What sort of craft is this?" asked the unknown, looking around in astonishment, as he accepted the chair offered him.

"It's the bumboat of Jack Yattaw," answered the proprietor.

"Ah, indeed!" cried the guest. "I've heard of you!"

"It would be a wonder if you hadn't," growled Jack. "I've been one of the big guns of Scawgo more years than you've lived, young man."

"You're known as the 'King of the Pier' and as the 'Pirate of the Lake'?"

Jack nodded contentedly.

"You're as much a feature of Chicago as the Garden Mybill is of Paris?"

The bumboat bowed again, while his wife proceeded to lay out a suit of his clothes, with a shirt and other necessities, for the stranger.

"Your craft is hitched to the Government pier, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this pier is a sort of neutral ground, or No Man's Land, where the city has no jurisdiction?"

"That's about the size of it."

"And so you have high old times here every night in the week, with the crowd of rags, tags,

and bobtails who come off here to drink, dance, and fight?"

"I see you're posted."

"You have music and mauling, fights and festivities, knock-downs and drag-outs, with all sorts of deviltry?"

"You speak, young man, as if you had been one of my patrons."

"Well, I haven't, but my cousin was down here last summer, and he told me all about it." Mrs. Yattaw here came to the front.

"If you'll step to yonder room, sir," she said, indicating the spot, "and get into this change of clothes, your friends may be able to know you later. You'll find soap and towels handy. By the time you come back to us, I'll have something ready in the shape of a breakfast."

This programme having been duly carried out on both sides, the stranger sat down to a repast which spoke well for the resources of his entertainers.

"What a singular craft you have here, captain!" he remarked, when he had appeased the first demands of his hunger. "It is neither canal-boat nor barge, but very much like them. Yonder is where your visitors dance, I suppose? Does the business pay?"

"If it didn't, I should soon be out of it," answered Jack. "But, tell us now about yourself. Where are you from?"

"From Muskegon," was the answer after a barely perceptible hesitation.

"You've been out on the lake all night, I see," said Jack, with an insinuating air. "In fact, you can't have left Muskegon in that row-boat?"

"No, sir. I left home in a small sloop, but was overtaken by a storm, and the sloop foundered, so that I was compelled to make my escape in the boat."

Jack and his wife exchanged glances in silence which showed that he didn't believe a word their guest was saying.

His hesitancy and agitation, in fact, were well calculated to throw suspicion and doubt upon him.

"You had better offer the gentleman a glass of that fine old California port," suggested Yattaw, giving his wife a look of secret intelligence. "It will do him good."

The suggestion was acted upon, and the guest drank the port, with thanks.

"And now I'll ask you again for your name, sir," said Jack.

"It's Eaton," returned the stranger.

He had scarcely made the statement, however, when he started violently, uttering a cry of distress which was also an ejaculation of amazement.

"What was in that port?" he demanded, with angry suspicion.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I feel so strange, so dizzy! Mind and body seem to be slipping away from me!"

Black Jack smiled.

"Villain! I see it all," cried Eaton tossing his hands wildly. "You've drugged me! But—"

His head sunk upon his breast, and he would have tumbled headlong if Jack had not caught him in his arms and eased him to a horizontal posture, where he lay in that stupid slumber which can be produced only by a powerful drug.

"Good!" muttered the bumboat. "The man must have some bill or letter on his person that'll tell us who he is. I'll go through his pockets."

The search was soon ended, and much to Jack's disgust.

"Not a line," he growled, his dark face becoming still darker—"not a single hint as to who the man is or where he came from! He must be a wary dog, and have good reasons for being so, to thus get rid of every clew to his identity! Whew! what a pile of money! Here must be thousands of dollars! In any case, I'll take care of it till he comes out of this sudden illness. That dose will keep him asleep till night, and another 'll last him till morning. He won't take leave of us till I've solved the mystery of his adventure with the gal who gave him those scratches. Blast him! he may have killed her! Help me move him to my bed."

The unconscious man was duly conveyed to the room where he had changed his clothes, and the door was locked upon him.

"I'll go to court now to get rid of that blasted Eytalian," announced Jack, after giving his wife a few instructions concerning the stranger, and you needn't be alarmed if I'm away two or three hours."

And, with this, he leaped nimbly to the pier and vanished.

CHAPTER II.

ON TRACK OF BIG GAME.

At that same hour, Bolly Blair, chief of the On-the-Wing Detectives, sat at his desk in his office in the Rookery, with a pile of letters and other documents before him.

"It's a big thing," he muttered, sweeping the papers into a drawer and turning a key upon them. "Something is sure to come of it. I wonder Swopp hasn't come to America in person to look after it. If he were only here—"

His musings were interrupted by a firm,

brisk tread outside his door, followed by a knock.

"Come in!" he called.

The visitor complied, closing the door behind him, after a swift glance into the passage he had traversed.

"What! Gordon Swopp?" cried the chief, springing to his feet and hastening to greet the new-comer. "When did you arrive?"

"Late last night, Bolly," returned Swopp, shaking hands heartily. "How do you do?"

"Never better, Gordon. And you?"

"O. K., Bolly," assured Swopp, dropping into the nearest chair. "Have you received my letters in regard to the visit of Sir Charles Depworth to this country?"

"Yes, and I was just wishing you were here to clear up a few points of the affair," returned the chief, lowering his voice and drawing his chair nearer. "You are here on this business?"

"Naturally, my boy," assured the English detective, who was a fine-looking, florid gentleman of thirty-eight, whose sharp eyes and clear-cut features indicated the shrewdest abilities.

"Good! When did you leave London?"

"Only eight days ago."

"Before or after Sir Charles Depworth?"

"I was a train behind him to Liverpool, but my steamer arrived at New York a few hours ahead of him."

"Does Sir Charles know you?"

"No more than he knows the mikada."

"You never spoke to him?"

"Never."

"And yet you take such an interest in his affairs that you have traveled four thousand miles on his account?"

The Englishman assented.

"Then he's quite in our line?"

"Never was man more so."

"He's booked for trouble?"

"Of a serious nature."

"And he don't even suspect it?"

"No more'n a babe unborn."

"And we alone can straighten out the impending complications?"

"Just so, my boy!"

The two men exchanged glances of the deepest satisfaction.

They were the master minds of the On-the-Wing Detectives, an international association, with headquarters in the principal cities; and a new and novel feature of their business was to ferret out all sorts of rascals and rascalities on their own hook, or without waiting to be hired or advised by the parties the most interested.

In other terms, the On-the-Wing Detectives constitute a very powerful secret agency for the protection of society.

Their method is to nip crookedness in the bud, before even its victims are aware of the machinations against them.

Bolly Blair, the American head of the association, as also its general manager, is barely seven-and-twenty, but he has done work which has made him known in both hemispheres, and his London associate, Captain Gordon Swopp, is well worthy of him.

"Where is Sir Charles Depworth now, captain?" resumed Blair, after a pause.

"Somewhere between here and New York, no doubt, and probably within a few hours of Chicago," answered Swopp.

"Then we may look for him in the course of the day?"

The Englishman nodded.

"There's no telling just when, but he may arrive at any moment."

"Who's with him?"

"His wife, Lady Depworth, and his private secretary, Fred Bullinger."

"You think this secretary is crooked?" pursued Blair, handing out some fine Havanas, and proceeding to light one.

Swopp nodded again.

"Have you posted yourself fully in regard to the business which has brought Sir Charles to America?"

"Oh, yes," answered Swopp. "He's here as the chairman of a great English syndicate which proposes to invest largely in American industries, such as breweries, manufactories, stock-yards, mines and the like."

"Then Sir Charles and his friends have plenty of money?"

"Millions of it, my dear boy—millions! And such being the case, you'll not be surprised to hear that the baronet is already the target of some of the worst crooks in London, and one of them—the notorious Hi Jenkins—is taking such an interest in the matter that he's sure to turn up here sooner or later."

"Isn't this Hi Jenkins the father of Mrs. Sally Rimmer, one of the queens of the demi-monde of London?" asked Blair.

"He is," informed Swopp, "and Mrs. Rimmer has recently captivated Fred Bullinger, the baronet's secretary. Out of this state of things, as you can see at a glance, is sure to come a game that'll be interesting."

"That's so," declared Blair, "especially as the Chicago papers have already said much about Sir Charles and his affairs, and so fixed the attention of at least two of the most dangerous

crooks in Chicago upon him. I refer to Bart Wyser and Dan the Swatter. Is this the first visit of Sir Charles to Chicago?"

"No, he was here sixteen years ago, with Lady Depworth, and thereby hangs a tale of the strangest description."

"Please explain, Gordon."

"Well, at that time the only child of the couple—their daughter and heiress—was stolen from them by a deadly enemy and from that hour to this they have never been able to get the least trace of the girl or her abductor."

"Horrible!" ejaculated Blair.

"Curiously enough, however," continued Swopp, "the baronet and Lady Depworth have conceived a hope—as wild as it is—that they will get some trace of their missing daughter through this new visit to Chicago, and I really believe they are more interested in this hope than in all the affairs of the syndicate represented by the baronet. Be that as it may, they have talked of the missing heiress so freely during their voyage from Liverpool that I've easily gathered the whole story from third parties, and a very keen zest does it give to the situation, as you will see when I give you the details."

"Have you any idea where Sir Charles is likely to stop in Chicago?" asked Blair, throwing away his cigar, with an air which meant action.

"Yes, at the Palmer."

"Then let us go and burrow there, in such a way as to constitute ourselves a secret body-guard of the baronet without his knowing it," proposed Blair, arising. "We cannot act too soon, or too much."

He affixed a small card to his door, informing possible clients that he would return in an hour, and then led the way from his office and from the Rookery building.

CHAPTER III.

THE GREAT CROOK FROM LONDON.

ARRIVING at the Palmer House, Bolly Blair conducted his associate to the office.

"How's travel, Ned?" he inquired of the clerk he found in charge.

"Very lively, sir," was the answer. "There's hardly a desirable room remaining."

"Please assign me one of the best you have," pursued Blair, "and this gentleman will occupy it with me till further advices."

He wrote a couple of names rapidly on the register, and the clerk placed against the same a number well up in the hundreds.

"Which of you is Carl Mossbach?" he then asked. "Is this distinguished Switzer you, Mr. Blair?"

The detective nodded.

"Then your friend is Herr Zweikopf, of course," pursued the clerk, giving Swopp a smile of welcome. "I see you hail from Thun. Is this because you intend to 'do' somebody before you vacate the apartment?"

"That's our intention, Ned," replied Blair, "but you'll have to help us."

"Tell me how, please."

"Why, you'll lodge near us, during the next day or two, anybody who hails from London."

The clerk looked into the eyes of the detective, with a smile of comprehension playing about his lips.

"I comprehend, sir," he then said, and in another moment, seizing the key of the room assigned him, Blair was taking his way through the intervening corridors.

"You seem to be at home here, Bolly," remarked Swopp, as they neared their destination.

"Oh, yes," replied the chief. "The Palmer is one of a dozen hotels in Chicago which pay me to keep the crooks out of them. I take a turn through the house every day or two, and it's very rare that any undesirable guest gets in here without soon getting out again."

Nothing more was said until the two detectives had taken possession of their room and were enjoying a little refreshment suited to the weather.

"Your idea is, I think," then queried Swopp, "to have Sir Charles under your eye from the moment of his arrival?"

Blair assented.

"The step is well taken," pursued the Englishman. "If half I see and suspect should be realized, we shall have ample use for all our cleverness."

"There's no doubt of that," avowed Blair. "Between the crooks of the Old World and those of the New, Sir Charles is sure to have a lively time before he has invested his millions. Do you know Hi Jenkins and his daughter?"

"Yes, Bolly, but they don't know me. I've often spotted them—"

Blair raised his finger warningly, and the two men listened to sounds of footsteps which had invaded the passage nearest them.

"Can it be we're to have neighbors so soon?" whispered the Englishman.

"Evidently," answered Blair.

The two men listened while a party was shown into a room adjoining them, and then a slip of paper was thrust under their door containing the following words in the handwriting of the clerk they had just quitted:

"Baron Bigland and daughter, London, England."

The two On-the-Wings exchanged glances of pleased excitement.

"Is there any such baron in England?" asked the chief.

"There is," replied Swopp, "but I don't believe he's just now in Chicago."

"Then who can this man be?"

"That remains to be seen, but I caught a few words from the daughter, as they came along the passage, which gave me an idea. Let me verify it."

Climbing upon a chair, Swopp peered over the transom sill of a door of communication between the two apartments.

"Begad!" he muttered, dropping back noiselessly to the floor. "Here's quick return for our trouble!"

"How so?"

"They're Hi Jenkins and his Sally!"

"Sure?" breathed Blair.

"I saw them both full in the face."

"But how dare he—"

"Oh, this conduct gives you the measure of the man!" interrupted Swopp. "He's one of the most daring scoundrels in existence. Ten to one he knows where the real baron is, and feels quite safe in the bold game he's playing."

"Caution!" whispered Blair.

Placing his ear at the keyhole, the detective listened to the conversation which had begun to reach his hearing.

"Are you tired, Sally?" a masculine voice was demanding.

"Not a bit, father," was the answer. "Did you register as Bigland?"

"I did, and this puts you under the necessity of figuring as Lady Chidder."

"I understand. Is it likely anybody will get onto our racket?"

"Of course not. The real baron is in India, and I don't believe half a dozen persons in America are familiar with his face and person."

"Are you sure the real baron is unknown to Sir Charles?" pursued the feminine voice, which the listening On-the-Wing had promptly recognized as that of Mrs. Sally Rimmer.

"Quite so," replied Hi Jenkins. "There's no danger whatever that we will be smoked out of our assumed characters during the few days we shall remain here. The real baron is wealthy, and it will not be difficult for me to pry into the baronet's affairs by representing that I am anxious to become one of his investors."

"But, the baronet isn't here, father, and there's no telling when he will be."

"Oh, he'll be here to-day," declared Jenkins, "and a few hours of delay will be no disadvantage to us. We shall not only get rested from our long journey, but can begin our acquaintance with the city and lay out our work. Are you sure the baronet's secretary is still ignorant of your real name and character?"

"Perfectly sure of it."

"He thinks you are Lady Chidder?"

"What else can he think, since he accepted me as such the evening before he left England?" suggested Mrs. Rimmer. "Can he have made any discovery to my disadvantage while crossing the Atlantic?"

"Certainly not. Do you feel like taking a drive of an hour or two?"

"I'd sooner stay here, father," answered the daughter. "The baronet and his party may arrive at any moment, and we ought to be here to take prompt action."

"That's so," acknowledged Jenkins. "We'll remain on the watch."

"And so will you and I, Gordon," whispered Bolly Blair to his associate, helping himself to a chair. "The game's getting interesting."

It was indeed!

The arrival of the English baronet was now the one thing needful!

CHAPTER IV.

A TRAGEDY OF THE PAST.

It seemed to Sir Charles Depworth, as he was whirled into the lakeside metropolis by the train in which he had left New York twenty-four hours before, that he had never made a more comfortable journey.

Not even in the renowned "Flying Scotchman," which he had often had occasion to use.

This, too, was the opinion of Lady Depworth, who sat beside him, with an air of pleased interest.

Sir Charles had just reached his forty-fifth year, and was the beau ideal of an English gentleman and business-man, courteous and quiet of speech and demeanor, with a fathomless blue eye, and that air of culture and refinement which comes so natural to the best intellects and capacities when they have enjoyed the advantages of wealth and social position.

His wife, who was some three years his junior, was still remarkable for her beauty, which was heightened by all those graces of deportment and conversation which characterize the higher class of English matrons.

Yet, despite all their wealth and culture, despite their very exceptional place in the world, it would have been easy for even a stranger to detect that the couple were a prey to the deepest sorrow.

There was a yearning in their glances, as also

an unrest in their manner, which had haunted them for many a long year, until it had become a part of their very being.

In other terms, they were always mourning for their stolen daughter, carried away by a remorseless enemy to some unknown fate, as Captain Swopp had stated to his associate.

"What a change from the Chicago of sixteen years ago!" Lady Depworth could not help saying, as she looked out upon the kaleidoscopic scene she was traversing. "I shouldn't know the place."

The baronet responded in similar strain, and the couple gave themselves up to the contemplation of the views every moment brought to their attention.

They were so absorbed, in fact, in the scenes passing under their gaze, that they gave hardly a glance or a thought to the baronet's private secretary, Fred Bullinger, who sat just behind them, on the opposite side of the coach.

About thirty, tall and angular, with a face and eyes indicative of dull, slow, but intense passions, the aspect of the secretary was rather singular than prepossessing.

He wore his hair parted in the middle, and was almost constantly caressing an enormous pair of mutton-chop whiskers, of the sort the late Lord Dundreary made so famous.

His father had been a distinguished man and a warm friend of the baronet, in the latter's youthful days, and it was more to this circumstance that the secretary owed his post than to any especial personal quality or merit.

The silence which had fallen upon the two remained unbroken until the train reached the station, the secretary thinking of the charming Lady Chidder, who had promised to see him in America, and Sir Charles and his wife recalling the terrible tragedy which had attended their previous visit to the great American city.

"To the Palmer House," ordered the baronet to the first hackman he encountered, at the moment of leaving the station.

"Any baggage, sir?" asked Jehu.

"Only three pieces. Here are the checks."

"This way, sir. Shall I take your grip?"

Sir Charles declined, his grasp tightening upon the somewhat capacious bag he was carrying, and Lady Depworth and Bullinger followed his example.

The party had scarcely taken possession of the elegant suite of rooms assigned them at the Palmer, when Bolly Blair presented himself in the character of a reporter.

"I come from the *Tribune*, Sir Charles," he said, producing the card of a real representative of the newspaper who permitted him to take these liberties, "and I desire to know if there is any truth in the report that you are here as the chairman of a great English syndicate?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Stark," answered Sir Charles, glancing at the card, and motioning the supposed reporter to a chair.

"You intend to make large investments in Chicago?"

"Here, or hereabouts, sir," acknowledged the baronet.

"Have you anything especial in view?"

"Yes, the Wizard Silver Mine of Lake Superior, near Isle Royale. We have been in treaty for that property several months, and expect to purchase the same, soon, if the owners can see their way to the acceptance of our figures. Colonel Southman, who is the principal proprietor, has already been notified of my intended visit to Chicago, and will doubtless call upon me in the course of the day."

"Have you ever been in Chicago before, Sir Charles?" pursued Blair.

"Yes, sixteen years ago."

"Is it true, as stated by some of your late fellow-passengers, that your only daughter was stolen from you on the occasion of that visit?"

The baronet looked intensely astonished, as did his wife.

"Has anything been printed to this effect?" he demanded.

"No, Sir Charles—"

"Then I must beg of you not to let the matter become public," the baronet hastened to say, deeply agitated, "for it is possible that the abductor will soon be called to account, and it is even permitted us to hope that we may recover our missing daughter. All this is a matter, however, about which we hope nothing will be said at present."

"Nothing shall be, Sir Charles," returned Bolly Blair "but, pardon me for saying that I desire to know something of your great loss, and that this desire is not inspired by idle curiosity. It is more than possible, Sir Charles, that I may be of some assistance to you in this very matter."

"Thanks, Mr. Stark," said the baronet, sealing carefully in his pocketbook the card which had been handed him. "You shall have the facts, sir, but let me insist on your taking a chair."

The detective sat down, and the baronet took two or three turns across the room, with the air of collecting his thoughts.

"During the first year after I graduated from college," he then resumed, "I was quite intimate. I am sorry to say, with the worst scamp I've ever known. His name was Dawling Caddle.

He not only made free with my purse, name, signature, and so on, but finally crowned his infamies by attempting to abduct the young lady to whom I was engaged to be married."

Bolly Blair bowed understandingly.

"Of course I negatived the attempt in question," continued the baronet, "and within a day or two thereafter I married the lady," he added, with a suggestive nod toward his wife. "I even forgave my base-hearted rival for all his rascalities, requiring of him only that he should take himself off to America or some other country far distant from England."

"The villain!" came from Lady Depworth, the sad story stirring her soul deeply—"the heartless, horrible villain!"

"He went away in due course," resumed Sir Charles, "and we heard of him afterward in New York and other American cities, but had dismissed him wholly from our thoughts by the time we made our first visit to Chicago. One only daughter—the only child we have ever had, in fact—was almost three years old at that time, and fair and sweet a child as ever existed."

He was interrupted a few moments by the sobs of Lady Depworth, who had broken down completely under the terrible memories evoked by her husband, but her ladyship soon became calmer, and Sir Charles continued:

"In some way—we have never known how—Dawling Caddle got trace of our presence in Chicago, and gained admission to our apartments when we were all asleep. The baby slept near my wife and myself, in its little crib. Did the villain use chloroform, or did he proceed with such gentleness and caution that the child was not disturbed in its deep slumbers! Heaven only knows! At about two o'clock in the morning my wife awoke and went to the crib to find it empty! Ah, my God! what a shriek aroused me!" and the baronet carried his hands involuntarily to his ears. "I hear it still!"

Heedless of the presence of the supposed reporter, Lady Depworth threw herself upon her husband's breast with a cry of agony which attested how little the flight of years had softened the sting of her sorrow.

"Our little one's bed was quite cold, although its coverings had been carefully replaced," proceeded the baronet, after struggling a few moments with his emotions, "and hence we knew that the despoiler of our home had long since made good his escape. We hastened to give the alarm, and we have employed special detectives on the case for years, but we had our labor for our pains. Not the least hint has ever reached us in regard to our daughter's fate."

"But, how do you know that Dawling Caddle abducted her?"

"Oh, he left a mocking, vengeful epistle behind him."

"What has given you the impression, Sir Charles?" asked Blair, after expressing his deep sympathy with the afflicted couple, "that some light will be thrown upon this subject in the course of your present stay in Chicago?"

"A number of circumstances, Mr. Stark," answered the baronet, "and among them the fact that my cousin, who knew Dawling Caddle, encountered him in Chicago less than six weeks ago!"

"Indeed?" cried Blair. "This is important and promising!"

"The more so as my cousin traced him to a little sloop lying at the Government pier, and saw him sail away in it," added Sir Charles. "We all believe the villain is located somewhere along the shores of Lake Michigan, and we venture to hope that our lost one is still living at the house of this man, ignorant alike of her real name and history, and of the hearts which have sorrowed so long and terribly for her."

"You have formed some plan of action, I presume?"

"Oh, yes," avowed the baronet. "We shall search both shores of the lake, and especially the Michigan side, for which Caddle seemed bound in his sloop, and we shall also avail ourselves of the great services the press is capable of rendering in this matter."

"As this will be in my line, Sir Charles," suggested the pretended reporter, with a smile, "may I hope that you will advise with me before taking any steps to give this subject further publicity?"

The baronet assented.

"Please also withhold from all other newspaper men the facts concerning your missing daughter."

"I will do so."

"Further, Sir Charles, as I have several points in reserve which it is not desirable to discuss now, will you kindly see me whenever I send my name to you?"

The manner of the detective was too impressive to permit the baronet to deny a request so natural and simple.

"Certainly," he answered, after a slight pause. "I shall be glad to see you at any time, Mr. Stark, and in the mean time you will please speak of my visit to Chicago in a general way only, and will retain in your own breast all I have said about my stolen daughter."

"I will, Sir Charles," assured Blair, inclining himself profoundly; and with this he took his departure.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOGUS BARON.

SIR CHARLES and Lady Depworth had no sooner been left to themselves, than he stepped to her side, his face expressing the deepest sympathy.

"Forgive me, Sylvia, for paining you with these sad memories," he said, "but I was drawn to this reporter, and believe he will help us. Remember, Dawling Caddle was seen in Chicago six weeks ago, and is likely to be near us at this moment. A liberal use of men and money will unearth him, and why shouldn't we hope our lost darling will be restored to us?"

"She may be dead—after all these years," faltered her ladyship.

"True, but we have good reasons for hoping to the contrary," returned Sir Charles. "She was almost three years old when we lost her, and had passed most of the dangers peculiar to infancy. Think what a great girl she is now, Sylvia—almost nineteen. You wouldn't know her."

"Oh, yes, Charles—anywhere and at any time," declared the sorrowing mother, a glow of yearning tenderness stealing over her sad features. "Yet what a world of questions came crowding upon me! Where has she been all these years? By what name has she been known? Has she passed all her days with that horrible Caddle, regarding him as her father? Oh, Charles! when shall we begin our search for her?"

"This very afternoon—or at the latest tomorrow," replied the baronet. "The first task in hand, you'll remember, is to deposit the syndicate's money. Fred and I will attend to this matter as soon as our letters are ready, while you rest and dress for dinner."

Assenting to this suggestion, Lady Depworth heaved a sigh of relief.

"I shall be glad when those funds are out of your hands," she said, with a glance at the portly bag the baronet had retained in his grasp from the train to the hotel. "I have worried ever since leaving London over the thought of your having so much money in your possession. There are over six hundred thousand pounds, I think you said, in that bag, in securities and certificates."

"Yes, or about three million of dollars, which is merely that portion of the syndicate's money I expect to pay out during the next few days. I shall draw half a million this afternoon. Colonel Southman, of the Wizard Mine, may have reached the city already, and the deal with him, if consummated, will require a large cash payment."

A chambermaid tapped lightly at the door at this juncture, presenting the cards of Baron Bigland and Lady Chidder, with an intimation that they would like to call a few moments, if agreeable.

"Bigland?" repeated Sir Charles, with an inquiring glance at his wife. "I thought the baron was in India, or somewhere in that direction?"

"And so he has been," returned her ladyship. "It must be that he is going home from the westward to the east, and that his daughter has come from England to meet him. Are they stopping at this hotel?"

"On this same floor, it seems," answered Sir Charles, glancing at the number on the cards. "In fact, there is only one room between us and them. We shall receive them, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. All Englishmen are friends, you know, when they meet in foreign countries."

She nodded pleasantly to the chambermaid, who retraced her steps to the apartments of the noted crook from London and his daughter, soon returning with the precious pair in her wake.

Sir Charles and Lady Depworth had left their doors open in anticipation of the call, and received the visitors at their threshold.

"You will pardon our great liberty, Sir Charles," said Hi Jenkins, who was ill at ease under his assumed pompousness, "but I've ventured to remember once more that all Englishmen are brothers."

He wrung the hand offered him, presenting his daughter, and the two were in turn presented to Lady Depworth, who invited them to be seated.

Hi Jenkins was not only attired with elegance and in the latest fashion, but his physique was that of a polished epicure—so much so, in fact, that no one ignorant of his identity would have suspected him of living by his wits, and still less of being one of the most daring and successful crooks who have figured in our current annals.

His daughter was a little too thin to be a beauty, especially as her face and figure were somewhat angular, but she had learned to ape the manners of real ladies successfully, and many were the bold masquerades in which she had figured to the detriment of her dupes and admirers.

The father had a youngish look, although he was fifty, but the daughter showed her years, which touched close upon thirty.

"Thank you, we'll remain merely a minute," said Jenkins, taking possession of the chair offered him. "Finding ourselves next door to you, we could do no less than call and exchange

greetings. Besides, I have been reading in the Chicago papers about your great syndicate, Sir Charles, and I'd like to have a brief talk with you this evening, with a view to becoming one of your stockholders, if there is still a chance for me."

Sir Charles smiled his thanks.

Such a proposition from a gentleman as wealthy and careful as the real Baron Bigland was known to be, could not have failed to be considered flattering.

"We shall be here several days at least, baron," replied Sir Charles, "and my wife and I will be glad to receive you and Lady Chidder at any time which may suit your convenience. I shall be pleased to explain to you the plans of our syndicate, and it is needless to add that I shall be proud of any co-operation your lordship may decide to give us."

"A thousand thanks, Sir Charles," returned Jenkins. "Will it be agreeable to you if we call about seven o'clock this evening?"

The baronet assented.

"Then we'll take that liberty," pursued the crook, arising, as did his daughter, who had been in casual converse with Lady Depworth.

"I would ask you to remain longer," added Sir Charles, as he and his wife also arose, "but I am going out with my secretary as soon as he has finished his correspondence."

"The first great step is taken, Sally—that of getting on visiting terms with them," muttered the bogus baron, on reaching his own apartment. "All the rest will come easy!"

"Or we'll know why not," appended Mrs. Rimmer, her lips closing in a sinister smile.

CHAPTER VI.

TEMPTRESS AND TEMPTED.

WHEN Bolly Blair returned to his English associate, after figuring as Mr. Stark, the reporter, he raised his eyebrows in a silent inquiry.

"Yes, I've overheard all, Bolly," avowed Captain Swopp. "A strange story that about the missing daughter and Dawling Caddle! The hope of Sir Charles does not seem so wild as it did. That girl may be recovered."

"I believe so, Gordon," declared Blair, "and we are the men to find her. Has 'Baron Bigland' and his daughter made any movement?"

"Not yet, but they are preparing to visit Sir Charles and Lady Depworth. Ah! there they go! Let's hear what they have to say."

This was no difficult matter, the room occupied by the two detectives being between those of Sir Charles and Hi Jenkins, with doors communicating in both directions.

All the On-the-Wings had to do to carry out Swopp's suggestion of listening was to cross from one side of their room to the other; and they accordingly gave due attention to all that was said and done during the visit of the crook and Sally Rimmer to Sir Charles and Lady Depworth, as just related.

Then, the crook and Sally returned, the detectives crossed their room again, and Bolly Blair proceeded to make further use of the key-hole which had already rendered him such good service.

He was just in time to hear the crook say to his daughter:

"You saw that bag, Sally?"

"Yes, father."

"That bag is awful tantalizing," pursued the crook. "It contains millions, no doubt, and yet there it stands in plain sight. I could rush into the room and seize it, and doubtless get out of the house with it, but I should be run down before I could get out of Chicago, and the result would be a new term in prison for a number of years. Need I say, in view of these facts, how utterly I am opposed to violence in this connection? What we must depend upon is cleverness, secrecy, and deception—just such talent, in fact, as we are now displaying in passing ourselves off on the baronet and his wife as Baron Bigland and his daughter."

"Yes, father," returned Mrs. Rimmer. "I agree with you that any violence is out of the question, unless indeed I incite some such dupe as Fred Bullinger to resort to it in my interest, or some such ruffian as Dan the Swetter to make use of it for money. By the way, how does it happen that we didn't see Bullinger? Where can he be?"

"He's in his room across the hall," replied the crook, "and is busying himself with the baronet's correspondence. You'll see him later, of course, and must in some way make a cat's-paw of him for getting hold of that bag or a portion of its contents."

"I'll see him now, father."

"But, he's busy!"

"I don't care for that. He'll never be too busy to see me, I'm certain!"

"Then he's dead gone on you?"

"As if stuck to me with wax," replied Sally, with smiling complacency. "He would have resigned his situation to remain with me in England, if I hadn't promised to see him in America."

"A fact? Then that speaks well for your hold upon him."

"Oh, I have him where he'll stay as long as wanted," declared the unscrupulous woman, in the hard, metallic tone which ever characterises

her species. "And I'm going to see him now because 'delays are dangerous!' We are by no means the only parties who have got their eyes on the baronet's millions. What's the number of Fred's room?"

The father mentioned it, and Sally opened her door and looked it up.

"It's almost in front of the baronet's," she whispered. "Please leave your door ajar, and keep an eye in that direction, to be sure that no one listens to what I say to him. I shall strike him for a few hundreds at least."

She glided swiftly along the hall, making little noise, and knocked lightly at the door of the room which had been assigned to the secretary.

"Come in!" was called out.

Sally complied, closing the door with quiet celerity.

"Ah, it's you, Lady Chidder?" the secretary exclaimed, springing up from the table where he had been writing and hastening to meet her. "I was never so pleased to see any one in my life."

He pressed very long and warmly the hand she offered him, and imprinted a kiss upon it before releasing it.

"Please be seated," he added, wheeling an easy-chair toward her.

"No, thank you, I shall stay only a moment," she replied, glancing at the table, which was literally loaded with his correspondence. "I came to ask two questions—yes, three. The first concerns your health, which I can see at a glance is excellent. The second is to ask you to call this evening, if you have nothing better to do, and the third—"

She hesitated, hanging her head, and simulating confusion very prettily.

The deluded secretary looked pleased, where a man better acquainted with the world would have displayed a manner wholly unresponsive.

"It's money again, of course?" he said, with friendly familiarity. "What a pity that the fairies of olden time do not minister to their sisters of to-day! How much do you need, my lady?"

"Whatever you can spare, more or less," Mr. Bullinger, replied the adventuress. "Our trouble comes from our having so much money in those wretched Argentine securities. We left a whole block of them with a banker to be closed out the day we sailed, with orders to cable us the proceeds, and not a penny has reached us."

"Never mind, my lady," returned Bullinger with undisguised sympathy. "Won't five hundred dollars keep the pot boiling for a day or two, till the remittance in question is cabled?"

"Certainly—if you could be so kind—"

The infatuated man cut short her hesitation by handing her the amount he had named, with the air of being very much her debtor for the opportunity to oblige her.

In good truth, his acquaintance with lords and ladies had not been very extensive, and he felt greatly flattered at having such intimate relations with no less a personage than Lady Chidder.

The adventuress, on the other hand, could not help appearing at her best under these circumstances, and she almost merited the name of charming, so far as appearances were concerned, as she stepped nearer and seized his hand with seeming impressiveness, pressing it warmly.

"You are as good as a brother, Fred—I mean, Mr. Bullinger—and you really seem to me like one," she murmured, recoiling toward the door, as if surprised and scared at her own act.

"I only regret that my resources are not greater, so that my acts could respond to my Will," said the secretary. "For instance, if I were Sir Charles, I could easily make this sum ten times greater. He's going to draw half a million this morning from some of the banks and bankers on whom we have large bills of exchange."

"Half a million? All at once? to do as he pleases with it?" returned Sally, in three separate ejaculations. "I think I should go wild at the thought of having for my own a tenth of that sum!"

"And yet, Baron Bigland is reputed very wealthy."

"True, but you've no idea how much popular rumor has exaggerated this matter," said Sally.

"But your estates in Ireland, and your town-house in London—"

"From some of our estates we haven't received a penny in years, and the expense on our town-house was so great that we rented it to a supposed American millionaire, who turned out to be a penniless adventurer, and has now abandoned the place to us, after damaging it to the extent of a thousand pounds, and doing us out of more than that amount in rent. But a truce to this gloomy subject. Is it a promise that you will see me this evening?"

"Of course it is, my lady."

"That odious title always sticking to me and getting in the way," exclaimed Sally, poutingly. "Why can't you call me by my maiden name—Lallie—as you are the only gentleman ever invited to do so?"

"May I, Lallie—"

"Of course you may, and I'll call you Fred—"

it will be so much more home-like, or like brother and sister. Don't disappoint me! I want so much to have you make the acquaintance of poor papa, who is all alone in this great country, and begins to regret already that he crossed the ocean."

"Oh, I'll come," promised the dupe, intoxicated by her condescension.

"Thank you. You are too kind."

Again she made a pretense of being carried away by an impulsive nature, darting toward him and giving his hand a fervent pressure, and then she fled in well-acted dismay, without a glance behind her.

"Oh, he's a softy," she exclaimed, a few moments later, reporting to her father. "See what he has 'loaned' me! I can do what I please with him. He's coming to see me this evening, and I want you to look every inch a baron."

The crook seated himself, with repeated nods of assent to his daughter's rapid sentences, and counted the money.

"Just five hundred," he muttered, slipping the money into his own pocket. "Egad! it pays to be beautiful, especially when beauty is backed by brains!"

"And here's a nice thing he told me, father," resumed Sally, her eyes glistening like those of a serpent. "He says the baronet is going to draw half a million in cash from the banks to-day, and would it be so very strange if I were to get hold of this money through the secretary?"

"Not at all, Sally, if the money should remain in the hands of Sir Charles over night," responded Hi Jenkins. "You must play boldly for it when the time comes for action. In the mean time, we cannot do better than make acquaintance with the city. Get ready, and I'll ring for a carriage."

"Merely to see the town, father?"

"No, dear, we'll combine business with pleasure," said Jenkins. "To begin with, we want to engage a driver of the right sort, who'd as soon drive a cowpse as a live man, if he's only well paid for it. We may want such a one to take us to a station or a boat in the harbor in a hurry!"

Sally assented earnestly.

"We ought also to get into touch with Dan the Swatter," added the pretended baron. "True, we have no acquaintance with him, beyond exchanging a few letters, but crookedness, like humanity, makes all the world akin, and I know we can work with him, or I wouldn't have given him full particulars of the great syndicate, forwarding the baronet's photograph. If your fair means should fail at any time with your pigeons, we must resort to foul, and such a chap as Dan can't too soon be at our service. Get ready."

Much to his regret Bolly Blair had been unable to overhear what passed between Sally and the secretary, but her report to the crook covered the principal points.

Hastening to communicate to Swopp the intention of the couple to take a drive, the chief of the On-the-Wings said:

"I will be their driver, Gordon, and endeavor to worm myself into their confidence, as some lively work is sure to grow out of that secretary's infatuation for Sally. She's unmistakably the woman in the case!"

"I agree with you, Bolly."

"Keep an eye on Sir Charles till I return," pursed Blair, "and shadow him everywhere if he goes out to the banks with the secretary. I'll take care to get back here before you do, and you'll find me at the ladies' entrance, in the character of 'Nibbs the coachman,' which I played for you so successfully the last time I was in London."

"All right, Bolly," returned the Englishman.

"Good-luck, as usual." And the chief of the On-the-Wings hastened to a little room up-stairs of which he was the permanent occupant, and in which he kept all the materials and clothing necessary for his make-up in a great variety of characters.

CHAPTER VII. THE FIRST SWOPP.

LEFT again to themselves by the withdrawal of Hi Jenkins and Sally Rimmer, Sir Charles and Lady Depworth exchanged significant glances.

"Truly, it is distance that lends enchantment to the view in this case," said the latter. "I wouldn't have believed Baron Bigland and Lady Chidder to be persons of this description."

"Nor would I," avowed the baronet. "I am almost tempted to regard them as impostors, or as crooks who have some design upon us. But enough of this. You still have safe the Bank of England notes I handed you in London?"

Her ladyship assented.

"Then there's a hundred thousand dollars in readiness for instant use," pursued the baronet; "but I may want three or four times as much more before the day is ended. Upon the whole, I had better prepare to draw half a million, when Fred and I go out."

Opening the bag to which attention has been directed, he took out a large package of bills of exchange, from which he made a selection.

"They're all to my order, of course," he remarked, closing and locking the bag, "and I may as well sign now those I intend to cash to-day."

He suited his action to the word, and then secured the bills in a leather wallet, which he restored to one of his breast pockets.

"None of these documents can be cashed till they bear my signature," he added, "and hence a thief wouldn't be able to realize upon them. This is the advantage of paper over money. Keep an eye on that bag, while I get into that new suit of clothes, and make myself presentable."

At the end of a few minutes he proceeded to Bullinger's room, just in time to miss an encounter with Sally.

The secretary was still busy with a number of letters and reports it was desirable to forward to London by the afternoon mail.

"How long before you'll have that correspondence finished, Fred?" asked Sir Charles.

"About ten minutes, sir."

"Then I shall have time to write a couple of letters about matters which have slipped my attention. You are not forgetting Coutts & Company?"

"No, sir."

"Nor the Twinings?"

"I've just finished the letter to them."

Seating himself at the table occupied by the secretary, the baronet wrote a couple of short letters, inclosing and addressing them.

"Everything is now ready for your signature, Sir Charles," then announced Bullinger, arising. "I'll inclose and seal the letters as fast as you sign them."

They worked a few moments in silence, and then the baronet said:

"To avoid losing time, we had better order a carriage. You may touch the bell."

Bullinger complied.

"Baron Bigland and his daughter have just called upon us," pursued the baronet. "I believe you are acquainted with her ladyship?"

"Slightly, sir. Are they stopping here?"

"Almost next door to us. Haven't you seen her yet?"

"No, sir."

"Let me warn you to beware of her," said, Sir Charles, banteringly. "She belongs to the dangerous class known as widows."

The secretary bent over his correspondence to hide the flush which had invaded his saturnine visage.

"Oh, I've no interest in her," he remarked carelessly. "Merely a passing acquaintance."

A bell-boy appeared at this moment, and Sir Charles ordered a carriage.

"There's one in waiting, sir," replied the boy.

"Then take us to it," enjoined the baronet, arising and retracing his steps to his own room. "I'll be with you in a moment."

The two gentlemen were soon seated in a covered carriage at the entrance of the hotel, the baronet having on the seat beside him the stout leather bag which had been such a source of anxiety to Lady Depworth as well as himself.

Captain Swopp sauntered carelessly in their wake.

"Where to first, Sir Charles?" asked Bullinger.

"To the Merchant's Loan and Trust Company," replied the baronet, naming the corner of Dearborn and Washington streets to the driver. "Such men as Marshall Field and George M. Pullman are directors in it, and I propose to leave a good slice of our funds on deposit with them."

The carriage began moving at this moment, and the two gentlemen gave their attention to their surroundings, the hand of Sir Charles resting carelessly on the bag containing his funds.

"You've never been here before, Fred, I believe?" remarked the baronet, after a brief survey of the scene before him.

"No, Sir Charles."

"Well, I shouldn't know that I had. What a wonderful city!"

An ordinary top-buggy struck in behind them at this moment, with the evident design on the part of its two occupants of keeping near them.

To have looked at these new-comers, with their slim, undersized figures, dudish garbs, and slender canes, a stranger would never have taken them for what they were—two of the most daring and rascally crooks ever known to Chicago.

They were, in fact, Dan the Swatter and his particular chum, Bart Wyser.

They had been watching for the advent of the baronet from the hotel, and had readily recognized him by comparing him with a photograph they had in their possession.

"Yes, that's Sir Charles," whispered the Swatter, "and that bag he is handling so carefully is the one which contains the syndicate's money."

"Where are they bound, do you suppose?" demanded Wyser.

"To deposit their funds, no doubt," returned Dan, in a barely audible whisper, his eyes glowing like fire.

"Then it's do or die before they reach their destination?"

"Yes, Bart."

"There's very little chance for us, Dan, in the natural course of things, I'm thinking?"

"Hardly any, I'm frank enough to say, but I was bound to avail myself of what there is. If there should be a runaway, a breakdown, a jam—"

"Ah! look there!"

The carriage of Sir Charles, which had reached the corner of Dearborn and Madison streets, had suddenly been halted by several large wagons coming from different directions.

"Turn to the left, Bart, and get a move on you into Madison," whispered Dan, concentrating his gaze on the baronet's carriage, which was still motionless. "I'll try for it!"

Slipping to the ground, with the agility of a cat, he glided rapidly in and out among the horses and vehicles between him and the object of his greed, and at the end of a few moments stood near the high hind wheel of the baronet's vehicle, which was just beginning to resume progress.

At this moment, as fate would have it, a grip-car struck a lady, who rent the air with a piercing scream, thus calling every eye upon her, except the eyes of the Swatter.

That diversion was all he needed!

With a plunge that can be compared only to that of a bird of prey, he reached into the carriage, which was now jammed anew, snatched the bag from its resting-place, extricated himself from a dozen horses and vehicles by a series of movements which kept him almost eclipsed from observation, and in less time than it takes to record the fact had resumed his seat beside Bart Wyser and was being driven toward Clark street at a furious gallop!

It was in vain that Captain Swopp, who had followed the baronet, pursuant to orders, endeavored to intercept the Swatter. He was knocked down by a horse and rolled in the mud, and very narrowly escaped being kicked or trampled to death before he could recover his footing.

When at last he reached the corner of Clark and Madison streets, the daring robber had vanished.

Turning to the right, they had driven northward at a pace which attracted no invidious attention, as they made a pretense of trying to stop their horse, and in less than a minute, they had crossed the bridge just in time to see it swung open behind them, thus cutting off all pursuit for the time being, if any had threatened them.

And in another minute Dan the Swatter was driving homeward as quietly as if he had been merely taking an ordinary morning recreation.

"We've done it," he muttered, in a voice of the wildest jubilation.

"And it's a hundred to one," returned Bart Wyser, "that this feat of ours will knock out everything we have done heretofore in this line, and be known as one of the neatest jobs ever done in Chicago!"

And here silence fell between the couple, their excitement holding them speechless.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BIT OF MUTUAL MASQUERADING.

By the time Bolly Blair had disguised himself suitably and stationed himself at the ladies' entrance of the hotel as the driver of a stylish turnout, Hi Jenkins and Sally made their appearance, escorted by one of Blair's employees, to whom he had given a hint to this effect.

"Where to, sir?" asked the On-the-Wing, after the couple had taken their seats, and been duly kodaked in that position by his employee.

Hi Jenkins hesitated a moment, with an uneasy glance at various persons standing near him.

Then his gaze came back to the face of his driver, which was a study for the most versatile comedian, being a matchless blending of hair, paint, patchwork and discolorings, the effect of which was to give the wearer a very hard look, with an especial aspect of having been in a fight, and of having a very black eye in consequence.

"Just drive in any direction you please that will take us out of this crowd—to some quiet place where my daughter and I can hear ourselves talk," the crook at length ordered.

"Suppose I take you first to Lincoln Park?" insinuated the On-the-Wing. "It's not only a beautiful place, which every stranger ought to visit, but it's very quiet there, at certain points—very."

The suggestion brought a look of relief to the crook's face.

"Thanks for the hint, driver," he said. "You may act upon it."

Mounting his box, the On-the-Wing drove quietly along Monroe street to Clark, into which he turned northward, thus passing the Court House and City Hall, upon which he discoursed with an ability which showed that he was well gotten up inside as outside, for the role he had undertaken.

Thence, crossing the river by the Clark street bridge, he followed North Clark to the southwest corner of the Park.

Driving slowly past the Lincoln Monument, he expatiated upon it and its hero in a style

worthy of a guide-book, and then drew up in the shade under a fine row of trees bordering the parade ground.

"From here, sir, we can drive in any direction you'd like to go," he announced, alighting and presenting himself at the door of the carriage. "Shall I take you to the New Breakwater Drive?"

"Where's that?" asked Sally.

"It's the new water front of the Park, ma'am," answered Blair, "and affords very fine views of the lake and shipping."

"I'll see about that later," observed the pretended baron, endeavoring to read the unreadable face before him. "Let me have a few words with you, driver. You seem to be a nice sort of man."

The On-the-Wing inclined himself profoundly.

"Do you know who I am?" pursued the crook.

The On-the-Wing nodded.

"I was told I was to drive for Baron Bigland and Lady Chidder," he took the trouble of saying.

"May I ask your name?" put in Mrs. Rimmer, with a glance which showed that she was somewhat puzzled by the strange appearance the detective presented.

"You may call me Nibbs, ma'am," replied Blair after some hesitation.

It was a very common occurrence for him to figure as the coachman of parties who had fallen under suspicion, and Nibbs was the name under which he always traveled on such occasions.

As Nibbs he had done very wonderful things, with the aid of his employees and allies.

"Is Nibbs your real name, my man?" inquired Jenkins, whose first view of everybody was that they were sailing under an alias.

The seeming hesitation of Blair became marked.

"No, sir," he finally answered. "The fact is—Can you keep a secret?"

"Just try us," invited the crook.

"Then I'll tell you candidly that I've abandoned my real name because I've been in prison."

"A convict!" gasped Sally.

"It's my misfortune, ma'am."

"You don't look it," assured Mrs. Rimmer emphatically. "What on earth could take such a clever man as you are to prison?"

"Your ladyship will excuse me, I'm sure," replied the On-the-Wing, with another profound inclination.

"Oh, tell us," insisted Sally.

"Well, I loved too much, ma'am," avowed the On-the-Wing with well-acted confusion.

"In other words, I had a wife too many!"

"That is no reason why you should keep your real name from us," commented Sally, smiling sweetly upon him. "What is it?"

"Sam Furbish, ma'am."

This name of Sam Furbish was not only a real one, but it was widely known in Crookdom.

It was, in fact, the name of one of the most noted pals of Dan the Swatter.

"Furbish!" repeated Jenkins. "The name sounds familiar."

"You may have heard of it in connection with Dan the Swatter," pursued Blair, whose purpose was to commend himself to the London crook by pretending to be another of the same species. "Dan's my particular friend, and many's the time he and I have been arrested together."

The crook and his daughter exchanged glances of intense satisfaction.

Nothing could have pleased them more than to thus find unexpectedly in the person of their driver the very reprobate they wanted.

"I remember your case now, Furbish," said Jenkins. "The particulars were given me by a friend who returned from Chicago to London. But you were sent for two years. How does it happen you have your liberty?"

"Oh, my friends had a 'pull,' and the governor sent me a pardon."

This was merely a pretense, of course, of the game Blair was playing.

The real Sam Furbish was still doing time in the Penitentiary, with many a long day of confinement ahead of him.

"And so you are driving this fine turnout under the assumed name of Nibbs?" pursued Jenkins. "I'm delighted to have made your acquaintance. Can you reserve yourself and your carriage entirely for our use, Furbish, during our stay in Chicago?"

"Certainly, sir, if you are willing to pay me my price, ten dollars a day."

"Oh, that's all right," spoke up Sally, smiling again. "You may consider yourself engaged to us. We want you to be constantly at our disposal. Where can we always find you?"

The pretended coachman informed her.

"Good," commented Sally. "Do you know where Dan the Swatter lives?"

"Do I know where he lives, ma'am?" returned Nibbs. "Why shouldn't I, when I've been there more times than you've got fingers and toes? He lives near Western avenue and West Jackson."

"He owns the house he lives in, I believe?" queried Jenkins.

"Yes, sir, although the title is in his sister, Mrs. Huff, who figures as his housekeeper."

"Why in her name, Furbish?"

"So that she can bail him, which she always does when he's in trouble. But don't use my real name, please. Call me Nibbs."

"All right, Mr. Nibbs," said Sally.

"And did Dan acquire the house in question by his particular line of industry?" inquired Jenkins, a little sarcastically.

"He did, sir—by swatting people on the head and going through their pockets while they were insensible. That's how he got his name, too. Swatting's his forte. He'd swatt you for a dollar if he knew you had that amount on your person, and he could get a good chance at you."

"I am curious to see this wonderful man," said the crook. "You may take me to his house."

"In the daytime?"

"What's that to do with it?"

"Why, some of those detectives who are always hanging around such crooks would get onto you, and then the grand question would arise as to what possible connection there can be between Baron Bigland and Dan the Swatter."

"Then what's to be done?"

"If you really wish to see Dan, you had better make an appointment through me to meet him at some safe and suitable rendezvous."

"Not at the hotel?"

"No. Dan wouldn't dare be seen calling there."

"Then where?"

"You might meet him on Black Jack Yattaw's bumboat, at the Government pier, at nine o'clock this evening," suggested the On-the-Wing. "You know something about Black Jack, I presume?"

"Yes, all about him, and I like your suggestion," returned Jenkins. "Will you undertake to see Dan during the afternoon and arrange for him to meet me at Black Jack's at the hour named?"

"I will, sir. But what shall I tell him? Does he know you?"

"I'll write him a line, so that all you'll have to do is to agree with him upon the hour."

Producing paper and envelopes from a capacious side-pocket, the noted crook from London proceeded to indite a few lines to his almost equally noted *confreere* of the Windy City.

"Be sure to make it clear to Dan who the letter is from, sir," suggested Blair, "so that he won't think the police is trying to wool him. I must tell you, sir, Dan is that suspicious that he'd swatt his own shadow if he caught it following him."

"Have no fear, my man," returned Jenkins, airily, continuing to write. "Dan'll know what he's getting."

The On-the-Wing inclined himself again, with the air of having nothing further to say.

"There! see that he has these lines promptly, Nibbs," enjoined the crook, passing the missive to the detective, after sealing the envelope containing it. "And now drive us through the Park and the principal streets and boulevards, getting us back to the hotel in half an hour."

Bolly Blair complied with these instructions, but had barely returned the couple to their hotel when his English associate came running to him in a state of the wildest excitement.

"What is it, Gordon?" demanded the chief of the On-the-Wings.

"The baronet's cash has been stolen!" whispered the new-comer—"a big haul!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE CROOKS ASTOUNDED.

THE particulars of the robbery were communicated to Blair in as few words as possible.

"What sort of a man is the thief?" was the chief's first question.

Captain Swopp described him, and a smile of comprehension wreathed Blair's lips.

"That man is Dan the Swatter," he declared, with as much certainty as if he had been an eyewitness. "Can you give me a hint of the party with him?"

Swopp hastened to do so.

"I see," commented Bolly, his smile deepening. "That second man is Bart Wyser. While 'Baron Bigland' has simply been scheming to do something, in the course of the day or evening, these daring 'twins' have put in a sample of their best work."

He asked a few questions respecting the conveyance used by the thieves and the route they had taken, and then said:

"The only way to recover that money is to drive like lightning to the house of Dan the Swatter."

"But will he go home?"

"Yes. Where else could he go? Where else could he even examine his booty? Ten to one we can get there ahead of him. Jump up."

The time made between the hotel and the abode of Dan Drindle, otherwise Dan the Swatter, was something marvelous, the horses which had been furnished the chief in his character of Nibbs the coachman, being two of the most powerful and best-trained animals ever seen in Chicago.

They not only knew how to speed when the road was open, but how to slow-up when it was closed, and were able to calculate distances and avoid obstructions almost as well as their driver.

Two or three times a policeman or a detective in plain clothes made a dash toward the flying pair, but at some mysterious sign from the on-the-Wing or at a recognition of the man or the horses, or else at some muttered ejaculation, hastened to get out of the way, comprehending that there was no occasion for their interference.

"That is the house yonder, Gordon," at length announced Bolly Blair to his associate, drawing rein and indicating the residence of the Swatter. "I see no sign of life about the premises, and fancy we are ahead of him. I'll get out here and finish the journey on foot. You can drive to the next corner, turning to the left out of sight and waiting there for me. If I find Dan's sister alone, I shall get her out of the way by some process—threats, false representations, or force—and quietly wait and watch for the arrival of the Swatter."

"But can you handle him without me?"

Nodding an affirmative, the chief leaped lightly to the ground and walked off at a lively pace toward the dwelling of the noted crook, ordering Swopp by a gesture to carry out his share of the programme.

Only those who had resided a long time in the neighborhood were aware that the house in question was inhabited.

The blinds were all closed, the yard overrun with weeds, and the wooden sidewalk from the street to the kitchen door was broken in several places.

A ghost of a woman was occasionally seen flitting into the house or from it after night had set in, but she never opened a window, or received a visitor, or answered any of the calls of book-agents, hucksters, and peddlers.

This woman was Mrs. Huff, the sister of Dan, and his housekeeper.

She was many years older than Dan, and had been a widow so long that no one had any knowledge of the time when she was a wife, or even of her husband.

She was thin to gauntness, undersized and morbidly skittish, with restless eyes, and that hunted look which gradually invades the gaze of those who live in apprehension.

Advancing to the kitchen door, the On-the-Wing knocked in a light, careless way, and then turned the knob and entered.

A cry of surprise came from Mrs. Huff, who sat at a table, in the act of paring potatoes for dinner.

"Don't be alarmed, ma'am," enjoined the caller. "Your brother will be here in a few minutes with the stolen money, but he sent me ahead to be sure that no one has slipped in here in his absence to watch and wait for him."

The words calmed the woman on the instant.

"No one has been here," she said. "Please be seated."

"Thanks," returned the On-the-Wing, accepting the chair offered him. "I believe you are fully aware of your brother's intentions? His idea was to seize the bag of money, if he had any chance of doing so, and hasten home with it."

Mrs. Huff looked at him in such a blank and unresponsive way that he readily saw the Swatter had not taken her into his confidence, possibly because there were so many chances against him.

"Are you quite sure, ma'am," resumed the On-the-Wing, "that we are alone?"

"How alone?"

"I mean, are you quite sure that none of those rascally detectives who are always worrying your brother have crept into the house unseen to arrest him?"

The woman looked frightened.

"My brother warned me against that very thing," she declared, arising and dropping the knife she had been using. "But I've fastened all the doors and windows."

"Are you sure of that?" demanded Blair, as he also arose. "I think some one is moving in the front part of the house—yes, in that closet off the back parlor. Suppose we see?"

Mrs. Huff led the way in the direction indicated, and was soon peering into the closet in question, the detective standing close behind her.

"I must tell you now, ma'am, who I really am," said the On-the-Wing, touching her arm.

"Who—you are?" she gasped, startled by the change in his manner.

"Yes, ma'am," he continued. "I'm the famous detective, Captain Crockleton—the most terrible detective the world has ever seen. I can catch your man while you wait! Didn't you ever hear of me?"

"Never, Mr. Crockleton."

"Then mark me well, ma'am," enjoined Blair, in a manner meant to be impressive. "I am here to arrest your brother. He has just robbed a bank, shooting the cashier and has run over two women and three children in making his escape. His case is a bad one, and if it can be shown that you are here waiting for him, you'll be carried off to prison for the balance of your days."

The woman's teeth chattered, her hands clinging to the door for support.

"What am I to do, Mr. Brottletbrown?" she demanded.

"You are to shut yourself up in this closet, Mrs. Huff," replied the detective, "and not stir or speak for at least half an hour. You're not to answer, even if you hear your brother calling you, but are to remain just as still as if you were dead."

"How long, if you please—"

"Until your brother has left the house," enjoined the On-the-Wing, hurriedly, his ear just then catching the rumble of a swiftly moving wagon. "There! Quiet!"

Pushing the woman into the closet, he closed the door upon her, and hastened to secrete himself in the pantry off the kitchen.

Still another brief wait, and Dan the Swatter came hurrying into the house, carrying in his hand a wooden box in which he had concealed the bag containing the syndicate's money.

Not seeing his sister, he halted in an attitude of surprise.

"Where are you, Tibby?" he called, after listening a moment. "Up-stairs or down cellar?"

Mrs. Huff heard him, but took good care not to answer, having a lively fear of the "terrible Captain Crockleton!"

"Don't you hear me, Tibby?" resumed the Swatter anxiously. "Where are you? What are you doing? Answer!"

"Tibby! Tibby!" he called, getting alarmed and apprehensive. "Surely, she wouldn't leave the house at such a moment! Can it be that she has had another of her fainting spells while making the beds?"

Thrusting the box into the pantry in which Blair had taken refuge, the crook turned the key in the outer door and went up-stairs two or three steps at a time, continuing to call the name of his sister.

He had barely cleared the kitchen when the On-the-Wing took the bag from the box and glided from the house, taking care to walk upon the grass, and thus avoid producing a single sound loud enough to reach the hearing of the Swatter.

It did not take many of his rapid strides to bring him to the spot where Captain Swopp was awaiting him, and in a moment thereafter the couple were taking their way back to the Palmer House—with what joyous excitement need not be stated.

Amazed and alarmed at his failure to get any response to his calls, the Swatter returned to the kitchen, when he was instantly struck by the fact that the outer door was ajar, as also by a change in the position of the door leading into the pantry, it being more widely open than he had left it.

Starting violently with a thrill of apprehension, he darted to the pantry—only to find that the bag he had left there had vanished!

With a yell and a curse, he ran out to the gate, glaring in every direction, but he was too late to get even a glimpse of the On-the-Wing, the sounds of whose wheels were covered by the rumble of other vehicles.

Going back to the kitchen as suddenly as he had left it, he found that Mrs. Huff had put in an appearance, and had resumed her task of peeling potatoes.

"Where have you been, Tibby?" gasped the Swatter, dropping into a chair. "Didn't you hear me calling you?"

"I did, Dan."

"Then why didn't you answer?"

"Because Mr. Crockleton told me not to."

"And who's Crockleton, if you please?" pursued the Swatter, with forced calmness.

"The great detective. He told me you had robbed a bank, shot the cashier, and run over two women and three children in making your escape!"

"And you believed all this?"

"Yes, I thought it just like you—too much like you not to be true!"

The Swatter looked at his sister a moment as if tempted to strangle her, but his will was of iron, and he was at length able to master his emotion.

"You're getting to be an awful fool, Tibby," he said. "Do you know what you've done?"

"No. Tell me."

"Well, I stole a hand-bag containing several millions—the money of that great English syndicate that we were reading about—and you've allowed some infernal detective to get in here ahead of me and carry off the bag before I had even opened it! Describe the man!"

Mrs. Huff endeavored to do so, but she was too perturbed to give any definite idea of her visitor.

"He's Bolly Blair, no doubt," muttered the Swatter, "but, if I don't get a stinger on him before many days I shall be greatly mistaken."

He sat as if paralyzed until aroused by the entrance of Bart Wyser, who had restored to the obliging pal who had loaned it the conveyance they had used in the robbery.

"I wish I was dead, Bart," wailed the Swatter, looking up with the most haggard countenance any one had ever seen him exhibit. "The capture of that bag is one of the neatest things I ever did, and yet I didn't get a cent for it."

"Why, how's that?" gasped Wyser, dropping into a chair, as if annihilated. "Was the bag a dummy, with nothing in it but brown paper?"

"I can't say, Bart. I didn't even get a chance to open it."

And with this he proceeded to tell his story, which caused Wyser a surprise and pain as great as his own.

"Well, we're out on *that* deal," at length said the latter, "but we needn't go out of business. The owner of the Wizard Silver Mine, Colonel South, is coming up the lake to see Sir Charles, and will be here in the course of the day—so the *Herald* says—and it is reported that he will bring along a few tons of silver bars with him."

"Time enough, Bart," returned the Swatter, arising, "and this is a matter about which I have made a very curious discovery. Come into the parlor, and we'll endeavor to hit upon a plan for getting a new hook into this syndicate business before the day's ended."

CHAPTER X.

A PUZZLING PERSONAGE.

"WELL, Charles?"

The greeting of Lady Depworth was almost a cry of distress, a single glance into her husband's face having told her that something terrible had happened.

"Well, Sylvia," he responded, dropping dejectedly into the nearest chair, "a very serious misfortune has overtaken me. That bag has been stolen, with all its contents."

"Stolen?"

"It was seized by some one who is evidently posted about my affairs," Sir Charles continued. "Let me tell you just how it happened."

He proceeded to do so.

"And you didn't see the face of the thief at all?"

"No, Sylvia. At the moment he reached into the carriage and seized the bag, his face was turned down, so that I only saw the top of his hat, and after that I caught only two or three glimpses of his back as he dodged among horses and vehicles, making his escape."

"So that you have no idea of his identity?"

"Not the slightest."

"And cannot describe him?"

"Not to furnish in any sense an adequate description. All I can say is that he seemed to be rather small of stature, and to wear his hair short, as also to be well-dressed, and that sort of thing, which really offers no clew whatever."

"Then what did you do?"

"The little that could be done, which was to drive to all our correspondents, one after another, and stop payment of our drafts and bills of exchange. It has taken us some time to go these rounds, as you will see, but it was the one thing to do."

"And what about the bills of exchange you signed before going out?"

"I cashed them, of course, and have the money in my pockets."

"About half a million?"

The baronet assented.

"But will the thieves be able to realize on their booty?"

"Not to any great extent, and that will be very risky business."

Footsteps resounded at this moment near the door, which had been left ajar, and Bolly Blair made his appearance—no longer as Nibbs the coachman, but as Mr. Stark, the newspaper reporter.

He had under his arm a parcel enveloped in brown paper, which at once fixed the attention of Sir Charles and Lady Depworth, although neither of them could have very well told why.

"You invited me to drop in any time, Sir Charles, and here I am," greeted the On-the-Wing, with a face and voice that were models of cheeriness. "I dare say you didn't expect me to return quite so promptly?"

"That may be true," returned the baronet, "but I am none the less pleased to see you. The truth is—"

"Pardon me, Sir Charles," interrupted the On-the-Wing, closing the door behind him, "if I make an instant end of the wild suspense I see in the eyes of her ladyship. Here's your missing treasure."

He whipped the bag out of its envelope as he spoke, and restored the same to the table where it had stood scarcely an hour and a half previous.

"What! it hasn't even been opened?" cried Sir Charles after a long stare of surprise, in which his wife joined him!

"No, Sir Charles—not even opened!"

"And the contents—"

"You'll find everything just as you left it, no doubt, sir," assured the On-the-Wing, his eyes moistening at the wild delight displayed by the couple. "And now tell me, please, just what measures you've taken for the recovery of this bag and the capture of the thieves?"

"None whatever, Mr. Stark," replied the baronet, proceeding to open the bag and verify the fact that its contents had not been molested. "I've had no time to act in either of these directions. The first thing to be done was to stop payment of all these documents, and that has

been no small matter. But, do tell us how this bag came into your hands, Mr. Stark."

"I took it from the thieves, sir."

"And who are they?"

"Two of our most illustrious crooks, Sir Charles—no less personages, in fact, than Dan the Swatter and Bart Wyser. They followed you when you left the hotel, with your secretary, and took advantage of the jam, and especially of that grip-car accident, to seize the bag."

"In Heaven's name, do you know all the details, Mr. Stark?"

"Just as well as if I had been present, assured the On-the-Wing, smiling. "I could have arrested the thieves, of course, but every good reason in the case is against any such measure. In the first place, you don't want any such notoriety."

"No, no, Mr. Stark," protested the baronet earnestly. "It would give me a bad look to my stockholders."

"Then, too, you didn't get a view of the thief, in all probability, that would enable you to identify him beyond all question?"

"No, I didn't."

"For these reasons, Sir Charles—and for a score of equally good ones—I have decided to make no arrests, and to keep very still about the whole occurrence," pursued the On-the-Wing chief.

"But I've been advised by several of the bankers I've just seen to put the case in the hands of Bolly Blair, who it seems, is a celebrated detective," remarked the baronet. "Do you know him?"

"I've never met him, Sir Charles," replied the On-the-Wing, "but I've heard a great deal about him, and I really believe him to be a decent sort of fellow. But, what do you want of him? You've got your money, and have decided to let the thieves alone."

"True, and that's all there is to be said," returned the baronet. "Don't you think so, Sylvia?"

"I certainly do," replied her ladyship, "except that we have to thank this kind gentleman for his services, and make a suitable acknowledgment for them."

"I was coming to that," said Sir Charles, with evident gratitude. "Will you accept, Mr. Stark the five thousand dollars I was thinking of offering for the recovery of the bag, and the arrest of the thieves?"

"Not a cent, sir," replied the On-the-Wing. "I've been at no expense, and haven't gone out of my legitimate path a single step to serve you. All I ask is the acceptance of the assurance that I am your sincere friend and well-wisher, and that I shall be glad to be of use to you again whenever opportunity offers."

The reader can easily imagine with what heartiness and thankfulness the baronet and his wife accepted the friendship thus placed at their disposal.

Champagne was ordered, and a few minutes were spent in further explanations.

"I could warn you against other crooks and surprises, Sir Charles," added Blair, on arising to take his departure, "but you'll please remember that even crooks cannot be arrested till they've done something, and that even the detectives can't tell what crooks are going to do, in most cases, until they've done it. All you can do, therefore, is to be on your guard, and not take anybody into your confidence until you know they deserve it."

"What a strange man!" murmured Lady Depworth, as she and the baronet stood at their door looking after him. "Who and what can he really be?"

"He talks and acts more like a detective than like a reporter," returned Sir Charles; "but he can't be the former, since he said he had never met Bolly Blair."

"You have his card, with his address, I believe?" murmured Lady Depworth. "Let's talk with him about the measures to be taken for the recovery of our lost darling."

"We will, Sylvia. And here a thought strikes me. May she not have been old enough to remember her name of Alphie?"

"Of course she was. And that may enable us to find her. Oh! where can she be?"

Let us see!

CHAPTER XI.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

NOT far from that same hour on the previous day a small, yawl-rigged yacht, in regular cruising trim, with mainsail, mizzen-sail, and jib, could have been seen standing to the southwest in Lake Michigan, midway between Grand Haven and Chicago, with a good breeze from north-by-west.

This craft was of sharpie model, with her sides amidships cut away so that the angle of flare was very pronounced.

She was running free, evidently bound for Chicago, and the breeze had sent her down to the gunwale line, but she was sturdy in her bearings, being assisted thereto by the size and weight of her loaded centerboard, as also by the heaviness of her keel and other timbers below the water line.

She had high combings, and consequently a deep, sheltering cockpit, and a high, roomy cabin for a boat of the kind, the roof being raised nine inches from the level of the deck, with the forward half tracked, and the after half grooved to run upon it.

The occupants of this craft were two in number—a man of twenty-eight, of a coarse and sinister type, and a girl of nineteen summers, whose beauty was of the most dainty description.

There was a strange flush on the face of this man, who sat at the tiller, and his glances lingered with singular persistency upon the charming picture the girl presented, as she reclined upon a bright Smyrna rug just within the entrance of the cabin.

"Won't you come and sit beside me, Alphie?" he suddenly asked.

"Certainly, brother," replied the maiden, springing up with the grace and agility of a fawn and crossing the cockpit to the side of the speaker. "Do you want me to give you a spell at the helm?"

"No, thank you," he answered, the intensity of his gaze deepening, as he motioned her to a seat near him. "The wind is getting a little too strong, I think, for you to handle the boat in it, and it seems to be getting fresher every moment. Besides, I want to talk with you. In fact, I've something very important to say."

The girl looked at him with unconcealed astonishment, as if the serious and thoughtful air he displayed was quite a novelty in their relations.

They were reputed brother and sister, Alphie and Florian Gilford, but the girl was as unlike the man as day is unlike night.

Neither in appearance nor manner could there have been detected the slightest resemblance between them. He was not only rough and awkward, but ignorant and unprincipled, while she was the very incarnation of gentleness, goodness and refinement.

They had come since breakfast from a point of the Michigan coast, just south of Muskegon, where their father, Derby Gilford, had a large farm, on which he had passed for many years a hermit-like existence.

"Important to you, you mean?" exclaimed Alphie Gilford, with a smile of scornful bitterness, as if repudiating the idea of having anything in common with him.

"Important to us both, I hope, and most assuredly to me," he declared, his features reddening, while his gaze searched her face keenly. "You must have noticed, Alphie, that I have been hanging around you almost constantly for the last month or two?"

The maiden assented, the smile leaving her sweet face.

"To be candid, Florian," she remarked, "you have been something of a puzzle to me, ever since my return from Detroit, and especially since I mentioned the offer of marriage I received and rejected during my stay in that city."

"How a puzzle, Alphie?"

"Why, from being the most indifferent of brothers," exclaimed the girl, "you have suddenly grown as attentive as a lover. You refused last month to take me to the Fourth of July celebration at Muskegon, and now you have insisted on taking me to Chicago for a week's visit."

Florian Gilford forced a laugh.

"Have you noticed a similar change in father's conduct?" he asked.

"Sure enough!"

"I'm glad such is the case," he said, hauling aft his main sheet a few points. "The time has come for a full explanation of the relations between us."

"Then there is a reason for the recent change in your conduct and in father's toward me?" demanded Alphie, her surprise and curiosity increasing. "What on earth can it be? Have you discovered that a vast fortune has been left me by some mysterious relative of whom I have no knowledge?"

"Something better than that, Alphie," affirmed Gilford. "I have learned quite recently that you are the adopted daughter of my parents, and not my own sister."

"Not—your own sister?"

The girl stared at him with wild eyes, her fair cheeks paling.

"Not in any sense a relative, not even the most distant," assured Gilford, "as these lines will tell you."

He thrust a sealed letter under her gaze, which had now become almost terrified.

"From father?" she breathed, after a glance at the address.

"Yes, from father. Read it."

The girl hastened to do so.

"You are not my own daughter, Alphie," read the few lines, "nor are you in any way of my family and kindred. I shall leave to Florian the task of explaining this matter further, and will close with the hope that you will become nearer and dearer to me than you are by accepting the offer of marriage my son proposes to make to you before this trip to Chicago is ended."

DERBY GILFORD.

The girl's hand closed convulsively upon the missive, crushing it.

"Is this an attempt at a joke?" she demanded, her eyes flashing.

"Certainly not," was the reply. "It's the simple statement of a fact."

"Then your father is not mine?"

"No, Alphie."

"And your mother wasn't mine?"

"No relation whatever."

"Then why didn't she tell me so, before she died, seven years ago?"

"She talked of doing so, but father didn't want you to know the truth then, for fear you would betray it to some one in a moment of girlish confidence. He finally satisfied mother with a promise to tell you all later, when you should be old enough to appreciate the information."

Alphie scanned the face before her keenly, with the air of finding something grotesque and hideous in the situation.

"If your father made such a promise to his wife as you have indicated," she then said, "why didn't he keep it? Why didn't he tell me himself?"

"He has—in that letter."

"A mere scrawl, which does not say a word as to who or what I really am," complained Alphie bitterly.

"He has left it to me, dear, to give you the particulars," ventured Gilford.

"Then why didn't you acquit yourself of your mission like a man?" demanded the girl stormily. "Why did you wait to get me out into the middle of Lake Michigan, alone in a boat with you? Surely, you must comprehend that I never would have started on this trip with you, if I had even had a hint of what you have now told me. Was it on your father's wish or suggestion that you have delayed your communication till now?"

Florian Gilford stirred uneasily, appearing at a loss how to answer.

"We talked up the matter," he then said, "and we concluded it would be right and proper for me to tell you the truth during the trip we are now taking. We realized," he added, with a forced smile, "that you would have a great many questions to ask, and I wanted to be quite at my leisure to answer them."

CHAPTER XII.

FROM BROTHER TO SUITOR.

AVERTING her face, Alphie Gilford gave herself up to the reflections crowding upon her, remaining silent so long that her companion became uneasy and impatient.

"Don't you believe what I've told you?" he at length demanded.

"Of course I do," answered Alphie, "and I'm even frank enough to add that I'm not at all surprised at these revelations. I've asked myself again and again, ever since I knew anything, if Derby Gilford could be my real father?"

"Why was that?"

"He has always acted in a most unfatherly manner, and I've thought at times that he must even hate me. Do you remember the quarrel Mrs. Cullerton had with him about me?"

"Only vaguely. What was the trouble?"

"Well, your father wanted to bring me up in ignorance, and make me a drudge in the kitchen," explained Alphie, "but Mrs. Cullerton would not allow it. I never knew all she said to him on this subject, but I know she threatened him with very serious consequences if he persisted in his purpose. I can see now that she must have had some hold of him—possibly a hint that I am not his daughter—for he allowed her to have her own way, and that is why I have received all the advantages of a thorough education. To Mrs. Cullerton I owe all I am, and I shall never cease to cherish her memory."

"I am glad she stood by you," returned Gilford, "for you would not now be the charming young lady you are if she had done otherwise. Did you ever have any other suspicions of father?"

"Yes, I have even doubted that his name is Derby Gilford."

Her companion looked startled.

"What can have given you such an idea?" he asked.

"A number of facts which I may choose to mention later," replied Alphie. "Don't the name of Derby strike you as fanciful, and as one likely to have been assumed?"

Gilford stirred again uneasily.

"With all that I have nothing to do," resumed the girl, her voice and manner becoming severe. "I am very glad to know that I am in no wise related to you and your father, and I shall avail myself of this knowledge in a practical way. In other terms, I shall bid adieu to both you and your father, Mr. Gilford, and proceed to earn my own living."

Her companion looked as if he had received a violent blow.

This formal address was something he had not foreseen.

"But, tell me what you know about me, Mr. Gilford," she continued, her glances searching his face almost sternly. "Where did I come from? Who were my parents? When did I first appear in the family of Derby Gilford? And how does it happen that no one has ever claimed me?"

Her hearer sat as if stunned.

"Speak up, sir!" she added. "Don't you know anything upon all these subjects?"

Florian Gilford stirred again, with the air of being very ill-at-ease.

"Yes, I know all about you," he acknowledged, "and I will give you the details when the right sort of relations have been established between us."

"What sort of relations?"

"Can you not guess? Not being your brother, there is no reason why you should refuse to accept me as a suitor for your hand."

Alphie stared at him as if she could not credit her hearing.

"There's no barrier to your wooing, to be sure," she said, icily, "except the simple fact that you are the very last man in the world I should choose in that capacity. But a truce to this chatter. If you really know who and what I am, have the goodness to tell me."

Something very like a frown passed over Gilford's features.

"I can be frank with you within certain limits," he said, "but father's orders are for me to reserve the secret of your parentage until you are my wife."

"Is he afraid I wouldn't marry you if you gave me the facts now?"

"Possibly."

"Or is he afraid I would do him some harm if the facts were now in my possession?"

"That, too, is possible."

"Then he has wronged me in some way?"

"I cannot say he hasn't."

"Did he steal me from my real parents?"

"I cannot answer questions of this nature, Alphie, till you've given me your promise."

"What promise?"

"To become my wife between now and Christmas."

The maiden looked at him still more scornfully, if possible.

"I've not been a model brother, it is true," pursued Gilford, "but I can be a model lover. May I consider myself accepted as such?"

"Not till I have taken leave of my senses," answered Alphie very decidedly, "and most assuredly not until you've answered some of my questions. I have often heard your father say that he is an Englishman, and that he came to America a long time ago, when I was a mere child. Does this imply that I am English born, Mr. Gilford, and that your father brought me to this country with him?"

"Not at all, Alphie," replied Gilford. "My parents had been settled near Muskegon a number of years before you came to us, and it is hardly six weeks since the facts in your case were first given me."

"A pretty state of things," commented the girl, with increasing bitterness.

"True, Alphie," returned her wooer, "but the situation is almost as bad for me as for you. For instance, I didn't know until last month that Derby Gilford was the second husband of my mother, and that he is not my real father."

"Then who is?"

"My mother's first husband, whose name was Anthony Gilford."

"Indeed? Then the name of your step-father is an assumed one, and one he must have borrowed from his predecessor for some good and sufficient reason."

"I won't say that you are wrong, Alphie. To the contrary, I'll admit that my reputed father did change his name for some reason about the time he married my mother."

A smile of scornful satisfaction gathered slowly about the girl's lips.

"That change of name is in some way associated with my history, that's clear enough," she declared, "and until further advice I will believe that your father stole me from my real parents, and that he was really forced to change his name to avoid the search they made for him."

Florian Gilford smiled, as if in admiration of her cleverness.

"That I'm right," she resumed, "is shown by the fact that Derby Gilford has made only three visits to Chicago in sixteen years, and that he came home very excited from the last of them, some six weeks ago, and talked with you all the following afternoon, and even later into the night. Will you tell me what he talked about?"

"Yes—if you promise to become my wife before Christmas."

"You may as well save your breath, Florian Gilford, as to waste it on that particular subject," declared the girl, with a severity that was almost solemn. "I begin to see that I have been a victim all these years of some fiendish machination on the part of your father, and that I have been made a stranger to my rightful home and relatives. Can you deny that such is the case?"

Her disagreeable wooer flushed vividly under this sudden question, but it did not enter into his plans to answer it.

"I see that I am right," continued Alphie, "and what a new world opens before me at the thought! At this very hour, there may be near me the dearest of relatives—my own father and mother—who may be mourning for me, and wondering if I am dead or alive, and if I will ever be restored to them. Oh! if I could only

know the truth! if I could only find them! what a new life would be mine!"

"All that can be a reality, Alphie, if you will only give me your promise to marry me," returned Gilford.

"Then you know—"

"Everything!"

"Who my parents are?"

"I do, Alphie."

"And where they are?"

"I can at least find them. I will even go so far as to say that they are expected in Chicago from one day to another!"

"My own father and mother?"

"Yes, Alphie."

"And how do you know they are expected in Chicago?"

"I read it in the Chicago papers."

"You did?" and the girl's lips quivered in breathless eagerness, her eyes glowing like stars. "Then they must be very distinguished and prominent?"

"They are!"

"And doubtless very wealthy?"

"Yes, dear."

"Where are they coming from?"

"From the old country. They are English by birth—as you are."

"And you can give me their names at this very moment?"

"I can, Alphie."

"But will you?"

"I will—if you will promise to become my wife before Christmas. That's all you have to say, dear—just one little word! Will you say it?"

"Never, Florian Gilford—never!" answered Alphie, with burning emphasis. "A thousand times never! I'd sooner die! I wouldn't marry you if you were the only man in the world! I hate you—I hate you! I hate your father! I'll have nothing to do with either of you—never! never! I won't even go to Chicago in your company. I want you to go about on the instant and return to Muskegon!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ABANDONED TO PERISH.

FOR a moment Florian Gilford seemed paralyzed by the girl's denunciations.

"I can't go about now," he then said, casting an uneasy glance into the lowering sky. "While we have been chattering"—he spoke with deep bitterness—"the wind has increased almost to a gale, and we've nothing to do but reef and run before it. Will you take the helm a moment?"

Bringing the head of the sharpie up to the wind, he relinquished the tiller to Alphie, trimming in the mizzen and jib sheets, and with the main boom well inboard the pennants were lashed and the reef points tied down, when the craft was let off again, and went bowling along on her former course.

"We're evidently booked for music," growled Gilford with a glance at the squally clouds behind him, as he resumed his place at the helm. "The only consolation I have is that the wind is favorable to us, and that you are with me."

"Then you won't turn back?"

"I couldn't think of it. We must go on together to Chicago."

The girl paled at the thought.

"I see how things are," she said, her eyes filling with tears. "You proposed this trip to Chicago in order to have me at your mercy. Your intention is to terrorize me into the acceptance of your odious suit."

"You may think so, if you choose," returned her admirer, with a sullen and revengeful wrath. "The essential is that you are in my hands, as you seem to realize, and that you will not get out of them. After the foolish frankness of which I have been guilty in talking up your affairs, I'll take good care that you don't get out of my clutches till you are Mrs. Gilford."

A crash succeeded which threatened to take the masts out of the sharpie, and Gilford saw that he had run into a group of floating logs, mostly of large dimensions—a raft of logs, in fact, only chained together—the bow of the sharpie striking one of them end on, and thus receiving a shock which caused her to tremble to her keel.

"What infernal luck!" he ejaculated, losing color, as he scanned the logs which were ranging alongside, the chain holding them together rattling ominously. "If that encounter didn't knock a hole in her, I'm greatly mistaken. Try the pump, Alphie."

The girl complied in silence, and at the very first stroke the worst fears of her persecutor were realized, the pump drawing to its full capacity.

At that moment, the centerboard was forced violently up into its case by a mass of logs which passed under it, but it was soon let back into its place, thus holding the whole raft around and beneath the sharpie.

"She leaks like a sieve," cried Gilford, his pallor increasing. "She may fill in a few minutes, and we're at least twenty-five miles from the nearest land. Pump with all your might, Alphie."

Thoroughly aroused by his terror, the maiden acted upon his instructions, but she realized at

the end of half a minute that the water was flowing into the craft far faster than the pump could remove it.

"We shall not be able to keep her afloat," muttered Gilford, who was already demoralized. "The hole is evidently too far below the water line for me to be able to reach it and stop it. Let me see."

Stationing Alphie at the helm again, he ran forward and investigated, leaning over the bow as far as possible, but a few swift glances sufficed to tell him the terrible story.

The sharpie had a large hole in her port bow which was simply beyond all remedy.

"Then we can do nothing to keep the water out?" cried Alphie.

"Nothing whatever," was her wooer's answer, as the sharpie staggered horribly over his feet with the water which had already invaded it. "She'll sink in less than a minute, certain!"

"Then what shall we do?" asked Alphie, with a calmness born of despair. "Can we escape in the boat?"

"Ah, yes—the boat!"

It was with wild cries of joy and relief that Florian Gilford sprung toward the boat in question.

It lay athwart the deck, between the main-mast and the cabin, where it had been secured by a couple of lashings.

It was merely a row-boat, fit for one person, and only in smooth water.

Cutting it clear of its fastenings, Gilford shoved it overboard, making a rope fast to its bow, and trailing it along the gunwale toward the stern.

"It seems a small craft—to carry two of us," murmured Alphie, as the sharpie lurched again violently.

"It is, indeed," answered her disagreeable suitor, in a hollow voice, his face as white as a sheet. "It would never reach the shore with both of us—never—in such a gale as is coming," and he cast another wild glance into the darkening heavens above him.

"Then what shall we do?" faltered Alphie again, wringing her hands.

"One of us will have to remain here," answered Gilford, who had secured the row-boat alongside, at the port quarter, to the leeward of the sharpie. "And that one," he added, "must be you!"

"No, no! Surely, you wouldn't abandon me to perish, after bringing me into this peril?" cried Alphie, in horror-stricken tones.

"It's inevitable!" was his answer, in a hard, merciless tone. "In such a situation as this every one must think of himself, and of himself only!"

"But you shall not leave me in this dastardly fashion!" protested the maiden, rushing forward and catching hold of him as he was about to go over the side into the boat. "It's worse than murder!"

"Every one for himself, I say, at such a time as this," yelled Gilford, as a shower of water burst up through the flooring of the cockpit, drenching both of them from head to foot. "Let go of me! Keep off, I say!"

"No, no! You shall not leave me!" cried Alphie, clinging to him with the strength of terror and despair. "Save me, too!"

Turning upon her, with a curse, and even striking her, he shoved her toward the cabin, with the evident intention of locking her in and so ridding himself of her.

But she fought him with all the fury of desperation, her sharp nails doing special execution upon his face, even when it was no longer possible to prevent him from forcing her into the cabin and locking her in.

"There! curse you!" was his farewell remark, as he bounded across the cockpit and took possession of his boat. "Since you won't be my wife, it is something to be rid of you forever!"

And with this he pushed clear of the sharpie—just in time, he believed, to avoid being carried down with it.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALPHIE'S FIGHT FOR LIFE.

THE brain of Alphie reeled at the awful fate to which she had been so basely and heartlessly abandoned.

She uttered what she believed to be her last sigh, and took what she believed to be a last look at her surroundings.

Yet the sharpie floated and floated, as if bearing a charmed existence.

Could it be possible, she soon ventured to ask herself, if there was still a chance of life for her?

At any rate, she could get out of the cabin, and this assuredly was a step in the right direction.

Like the majority of well-equipped yachts, the sharpie carried a kit of tools designed to meet all emergencies, and among these tools was an ax, a heavy hammer, with saws, bits and braces, and others too numerous to mention.

To burst open the doors, imprisoning her, was the work of a few seconds only, when the thought had once occurred to her, and she stepped out into the cockpit.

Her first glance was for Gilford, who had taken off his coat and vest, so as to be ready to

put forth his best efforts in case of a capsize, with which his frail craft was every moment threatened.

He was wielding an oar, and seemed perfectly able to give the boat a forward movement, as also to steady it before the wind, for he was already fifty rods to the leeward.

Even in the face of the awful peril by which she was menaced, Alphonse could not help rejoicing that she was rid of his unwelcome presence.

Might not fate, too, be kinder than she had ventured to hope?

Might there not still be a chance for her?

At any rate, she could and would put everything shipshape, and this she hastened to do.

Lashing the helm, she hauled aft the mainsheet, and crutched and tied the boom snugly amidships, then lowering the sail and stowing it, despite all the perils and exertions by which the task was attended.

A like effort resulted in the stowing of both the mizzen and the jib, and by this time the brave girl was fully entitled to think that Gilford's fear of the immediate foundering of the sharpie had been a mistake.

"It must be," she thought, "that the log raft beneath the sharpie is giving it positive support, steadiness, and protection."

"If otherwise, why did not some of the long, staggering lunges of the craft carry it under forever?"

The moment the reflections of Alphonse had taken this turn, they led to practical action and endeavor.

The centerboard was sixteen feet in length by four in depth at the forward end, and seven feet at the other.

It was attached at the forward end to a strong iron rod which ran upward above the deck, and was so keyed that a single blow with a hammer would release the rivet, and allow the whole board to go to the bottom without any wrench or shock to the boat.

The iron attached to this centerboard in the usual form and manner, weighed no less than fifteen hundred pounds, or quite enough, it was possible, to pull the sharpie under as soon as it should be filled with water.

Be all that as it might, it seemed desirable to get rid of the centerboard, and in another moment it had started for the bottom of the lake.

Waiting and watching, it did not take Alphonse long to realize that she had done well in suppressing the centerboard, for the sharpie was unmistakably fifteen hundred pounds the lighter.

The girl could not only see that the water had ceased to run in, but that it was actually running out.

In other terms, the sharpie was now buoyed up by the logs beneath it to such an extent that it was absolutely unsinkable.

As a realization of this fact entered her soul, Alphonse knelt upon the deck, a sweet and solemn thanksgiving escaping her lips as naturally as perfume radiates from a flower.

What a joyous relief it was to feel that the wild waves surging around her could not harm her!

Making her way into the cabin with utter indifference to the water swashing to and fro in it, as also the cockpit, at every movement of the sharpie, she secured the lunch basket she had packed for the voyage across the lake, and proceeded to satisfy the keen hunger which had assailed her, as the result of her exertions.

Her thoughts coming back to Gilford, she scanned the surface of the waters for another glimpse of him, but was unable to secure it.

It seemed to her that his boat might have already been swamped, and she said to herself that not for anything in the world would she be willing to change places with him.

Making herself a snug and secure nest in the mainsail, near the foot of the mast, she gave herself up to the exciting thoughts crowding upon her.

Her eventual escape from all the furies of her trip seemed now a foregone conclusion.

If the sharpie should fail to be blown into the very harbor of Chicago, she could safely count upon being rescued by a passing vessel.

That was wholly out of the question.

What she now had to do was to provide herself a new home, and to enter upon a quiet but earnest quest for the parents from whom she had been stolen.

The sun went down upon her musings, leaving the lake shrouded in darkness, there being no moon and little starlight, but not a thought of danger or solitude obtruded itself upon her.

In her gentle, trustful way, she believed that the gloom and unrest of her recent years was to be lifted from her, and that the happiness and love for which she was yearning, and to which she was entitled, would very soon become her permanent possession.

Lighter and lighter grew the breeze, as the evening wore on, and at length it seemed to her to be blowing from a new quarter, and to even change its direction often; but even these events did not seriously disturb the peace and hope which had descended upon her.

Now and then the scream of some wild bird of the night fell upon her hearing, and two or three times her gaze encountered the lights of some distant steamer or other passing vessel, but she scarcely gave them a thought, so completely

was she absorbed in the great, burning questions of her parentage and her future.

Hour after hour thus passed, but at length the rippling and swashing of the waves around her became a lullaby to her tired senses, and the dusky little head sunk lower into the strange nest she had so artlessly improvised in the sail, and she slept as sweetly beneath the endless canopy of the stars as ever slept a weary child upon its mother's bosom.

And that pitying angels came and ministered unto her with sweet visions of the home and loved ones from whom she had been so ruthlessly torn, need not be doubted!

CHAPTER XV.

HOW HELP CAME TO HER.

WHEN Alphonse awoke, the sun was high in the heavens, and the sharpie lay as motionless in its setting of logs as if aground, the fresh breeze of the preceding day having almost died out.

The first glance of the girl was to see where she was, but she could not detect much change from the scene on which the sun had gone down the evening before.

She was still lost, as it were, in an immensity of waters, not the least glimpse of land being visible.

She scanned the surface of the lake in every direction for some sign of deliverance, but was forced to realize that the prospect was by no means inspiring, the three or four sails that were visible being low down on the horizon.

Nevertheless, she did not allow herself to be cast down by this circumstance.

It was something that she had enjoyed such a refreshing slumber, and was quite herself again.

It was something, too, that the Sharpie was still afloat, and likely to remain so, it being entangled with the raft of logs which had so strangely prevented it from going to the bottom.

It occurred to the girl that she ought to set a signal of distress, and she hastened to do so, although quite aware that a single view of the sharpie would be enough to tell any practical eye that something was wrong.

Then, bathing her face in a basin of water, she combed and braided her hair, arranging it with the aid of a hand-glass suspended to the mainmast, and placing her hat jauntily upon it.

"I'm all right," she ejaculated, gayly, when she had completed her toilet. "And now to have breakfast."

Planting herself upon the boom, at the foot of the mainmast, she made a hearty repast from the supplies still left her, and then set herself to watching her surroundings.

A breeze soon came to ruffle the water, and Alphonse hailed it as an excellent omen, the more especially as it seemed to come from the north, so far as she could judge from the sun's position in the heavens.

"It will help me on my way," was her hopeful reflection.

With the breeze came additional sails, some of them passing nearer, and the fact quickened the girl's hope of an early rescue from her trying situation.

Yet hour after hour went by and no one came to her assistance.

She began to get impatient and anxious.

As certain as she was of being rid of Gilford, she experienced a thrill of apprehension every time she saw a sail standing toward her.

What if he should come back?

At length, however, she saw a craft steering toward her with an air indicative of business.

It proved to be a fore-and-aft schooner of about a hundred tons, and the speed at which it neared her suggested to Alphonse that it was either in ballast or very lightly loaded.

After a long period of watching and waiting she was able to make out a number of masculine figures upon the fore-castle, and to these was eventually added the figure of a woman.

By this time Alphonse was able to see that she had become an object of keen interest and curiosity to those aboard of the schooner, and she sprung upon the boom, steadying herself against the mast, and waved her handkerchief to them with a violence that responded to her agitated feelings.

An answer was immediately given her, not merely by the lady, but by a couple of gentlemen standing beside her.

"They're coming, sure enough," breathed Alphonse, her bright face flushing with delight, as she noticed that the schooner was headed directly toward her. "I am saved!"

Nearer and nearer came the schooner, friendly signals continuing, and ere long it was hove to within a hundred yards of the sharpie.

A boat was lowered, and a young gentleman took possession of it, rowing across the intervening space with as much grace as vigor.

"In heaven's name," came from this young gentleman, as he was feeling his way alongside in the midst of several outlying logs, "is this a reality, or am I dreaming? Are you Alphonse Gilford?"

"Just as certainly as you are Harry Southman," replied the girl, her rosy flush deepening, as she sprung lightly from the boom. "What a strange meeting!"

"It is indeed," declared Harry Southman, backing his boat against the port side of the

Alphonse. "Jump in here, with all your effects, if you have any, as our time is very pressing."

The maiden complied as promptly as possible, seating herself in the stern of the boat, which immediately started on its return to the schooner.

"It's wonderful that I should find *you* in such a situation, Miss Gilford," resumed her deliverer, his glances lingering upon the girl's face with an intense admiration, if not with a warmer emotion.

"And equally wonderful that *you* should be my rescuer," returned Alphonse, her voice vibrating with emotion.

"It would seem to me—if I dared to hope so much—that the Infinite Hand has brought us together again, as a hint that our recent painful separation was unnecessary," continued the rescuer, plying his oars nervously. "Is the thought a rash one, Miss Gilford?"

"By no means—or I could not confess that I share it," replied Alphonse, her great, soulful eyes filling with tears.

"In any and every case," declared Harry Southman, "I am very glad to meet you again."

"The pleasure is mutual, sir," breathed Alphonse, looking up timidly into the handsome face. "The memory of this day will always be a gladness because you are associated with it."

"Thank you!"

Nothing more was said until the boat had reached the schooner, and the girl and her rescuer had been assisted to the deck.

Leaving two or three seamen to restore the boat to its davits, while the schooner resumed its course, Harry Southman drew the arm of Alphonse within his own and conducted her to a fine-looking, middle-aged couple who were advancing to meet them.

"My dear parents," said Harry, "you have heard me speak of a young lady who rejected an offer of marriage from me in Detroit some seven weeks ago?"

His father and mother assented, their glances alternating between his smiling countenance and the rosy cheeks of Alphonse.

"Well, here she is," resumed Harry—Miss Alphonse Gilford, of Muskegon. I didn't propose to her without telling her all about you, but allow me to present her formally to you. Miss Alphonse, this gentleman is Colonel Archy Southman, my father, and this lady is my mother."

"We are very glad to know you personally, Miss Gilford," said Mrs. Southman, almost tenderly, drawing Alphonse to her side and kissing her.

"Be sure that no one could find a warmer welcome here than you do, my dear young lady, after all the nice things our Harry has said about you," assured the colonel, pressing her hand warmly. "Come into the cabin."

Drawing her arm within his own, with a fatherly air, the colonel conducted her in the direction indicated, Mrs. Southman and Harry following them.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALPHIE AND HARRY.

THE very kind reception given her by the Southmans put Alphonse at her ease on the instant.

In good truth, she couldn't have been in better company.

The colonel and his wife were a model couple in every respect—genial, thoughtful of others, and always endeavoring to make every one who came in contact with them a partaker of their happiness, which had never been in any way clouded.

As to Harry, he was as good of heart as handsome of person, and was regarded with intense affection and respect by his parents and other relatives, and indeed by all who knew him.

"Please be seated here, my dear child," said the colonel, conducting her to a luxurious sofa occupying a prominent place in the cabin, "and let us know the nature of the disaster which has overtaken you. Your sloop is evidently a wreck."

"Yes, sir," replied Alphonse, seating herself on the sofa. "We ran into a raft of logs, one of which struck the sharpie end on, knocking such a large hole in her bow below the water-line that it filled in a few minutes."

"Then why didn't it sink?" inquired Colonel Southman.

"I detached the centerboard, with the fifteen hundred pounds of iron attached to it," explained the girl, "and that sufficed to save me, the logs entangled under the sharpie having buoyancy enough to keep it afloat."

"And how long have you been in that situation?" asked Mrs. Southman, seating herself beside her.

"Since early in the afternoon of yesterday."

"Indeed! What a miracle!" cried Harry, with keen interest. "But do you mean to tell us that you started alone on this voyage?"

"No, sir. I was accompanied by a man I supposed to be my brother."

"Ah, by Florian Gilford?" exclaimed Harry Southman.

"Yes, by Florian Gilford," pursued Alphonse.

"We left our place at a reasonable hour of the morning, with the intention of taking a week's trip to Chicago. On our way up the lake young Gilford informed me that I'm not his sister, nor in any wise related to him."

"How strange!" commented the colonel.

"Then who are you?" asked Mrs. Southman.

"I haven't the least idea who I am," replied Alphie, "but it appears from the statements of Florian that I belong to a distinguished and wealthy family which is expected from one day to another to arrive in Chicago."

"How singular!" cried Harry.

"Most extraordinary," murmured his mother.

"Florian offered to tell me just who and what I am if I would promise to marry him," resumed Alphie, "but I refused to entertain any such proposition for even a moment. He proceeded to coax and threaten, but just then the sharpie struck the raft of logs, and in another minute he was wild with terror, thinking only of escape."

"And how did he manage to get away?" demanded the colonel.

"Why, he embarked in the little row-boat which is used as a tender to the sharpie."

"And did not take you?" breathed Harry.

"He said the boat wasn't big enough to carry both of us," continued Alphie. "I insisted, of course, and even tried to get into the boat, but he repulsed me, and at length locked me up in the cabin and made his escape, saying that it was a good thing for me to go to the bottom, seeing that I wouldn't marry him!"

"The monster!" exclaimed Harry, while his parents were loud in their expressions of indignation and horror. "Tell us what you did next."

"I simply broke out of the cabin with the ax and hammer at my disposal," explained Alphie, with a serene smile, "and proceeded to make myself as comfortable as circumstances permitted."

"And you were alone on the sharpie all night?" queried Harry.

The maiden assented.

"Were you afraid?" asked the colonel.

"No, sir. I had no occasion to be. I knew the sharpie would remain afloat until sufficient wind came to detach the logs from it."

"Did you sleep any?" asked Mrs. Southman.

"As well as if I had been in my own bed."

"Where, my dear child?"

"In a snug little nest I made in the mainsail, which I stowed alone after Florian Gilford left me."

"What a state of things!" ejaculated Colonel Southman, his eyes moistening. "And what do you propose to do now, child? Will you go back to the Gilfords?"

"Never, sir—never!"

"What then?"

"I shall remain in Chicago, earning my own living, and making an effort to find my father and mother."

"Good," commented the colonel. "In this effort we will assist you. Have you any clew to go upon further than that your parents are distinguished and wealthy and are daily expected in Chicago?"

"No, sir, except that I am English born, and that my parents are coming from England."

"Bravo!" cried the colonel. "You have fallen into just the right hands. We are now on our way to Chicago to meet a distinguished Englishman—I refer to Sir Charles Depworth, who is expected to arrive there to-day or to-morrow—and we'll take good care to press him into our service in this matter. But tell us, my dear child, why you rejected Harry's offer of marriage."

"It was because Angie Gilford lied to me," answered Alphie.

"How lied to you?" asked Mrs. Southman.

"She said that Harry had been wooing her at the same time he was waiting on me, and I was fool enough to believe her."

"Then you rejected our boy because of her falsehoods?" ventured the colonel.

"I did, sir—I'm sorry to say," confessed Alphie, in a barely audible voice. "It was only a few days thereafter that the truth became manifest, but—it was then too late."

The colonel and Mrs. Southman arose with an alacrity little short of surprising.

"I am sure you'll both excuse us a few moments," said the mother. "The truth is, Alphie, we have a million in bar silver aboard of this schooner, and are compelled to watch several of our sailors incessantly to prevent them from making an attempt to capture our ship and our treasure."

"And it is because I am thus crippled and short-handed, my dear child," remarked the colonel, drawing his wife's arm within his own and moving toward the entrance, "that I didn't say a word about bringing your sharpie into port. Let us hope that somebody else more favorably situated will render you that service."

The couple ascended to the deck, with a little nod of adieu to Alphie, who thus found herself left alone with Harry.

"How good they are!" she murmured, her eyes filling with tears, as she looked after them.

"They just kill me with kindness."

"In the absence of your own parents, or until

your own parents are found, Alphie—dear Alphie—how would you like my parents to be yours?" asked Harry, stepping nearer.

The fair girl turned to him, as the needle turns to the magnet.

"Do you mean, Harry," she cried, springing to her feet, "that you can and will forgive me for the great wrong I have done both you and myself by that wicked rejection of your hand seven weeks ago in Detroit?"

"Yes, that's what I mean, darling," assured Harry. "Will the prayer I then uttered be granted now?"

Advancing still nearer, he opened his arms to her, and in another moment she lay sobbing upon his breast in unutterable gladness.

CHAPTER XVII.

BLACK JACK RESUMES HIS INQUIRY.

THE absence of Black Jack Yattaw from his bumboat lasted longer than he had foreseen, it being late in the afternoon when he returned.

In this time, however, he had got rid of his "Eyetalian," and had given due attention to several other cases which were being pressed against him.

His wife met him at the gangway, flushed and excited.

"Well, mother?" he demanded, halting.

"Well, Jack," she replied, "you had hardly got clear of the boat when that mysterious stranger from the lake began to recover his senses."

"So that you had to give him another drink of port?"

"No. I compromised with him."

"Com-pro-mised with him?" echoed Black Jack, slowly. "How was that?"

"Why, I first bound him hand and foot, and made my preparations to gag him in case of need."

"Clever woman! Go on."

"Then I waited until he had recovered his senses sufficiently to comprehend me, and proceeded to explain to him the situation."

"How explain it?"

"I told him that another drink of that 'fine old California port' would certainly put him to sleep until the middle of the afternoon, and that I'd turn another down his throat—or two of them if necessary—if he dared to say boo."

"And he didn't dare say it?"

"No, Jack," continued Mrs. Yattaw. "He said he had the best of reasons for wishing to remain in possession of his senses, and inquired if we couldn't compromise matters upon a better basis than fighting and screeching and that sort of thing."

"And you assented?"

"Certainly. I told him I'd give him a drink of whisky every hour till your return if he'd keep quiet, and he accepted. In fact, he rolled over and went to sleep, and I haven't heard a word from him since."

"You're a daisy, mother," commented Black Jack. "I couldn't have done better myself. Let's take a look at him."

They found the stranger staring in a hard and angry fashion into the cabin of the bumboat, from the sort of alcove in which he had been deposited.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Yattaw?" he exclaimed at sight of the couple. "Just in time! I was about to break forth in sheet English! I want to get out of this."

"And I want you to get out," replied the bumboat, "seeing that you are in my bed, and that I must take a nap myself, so as to be ready for the evening's festivities."

"Very good. Untie me."

"Not so fast, stranger," enjoined Black Jack, impressively, hovering over his mysterious guest. "I am willing to make you comfortable—so—leaving your hands and tongue free, but you won't skip until you've told me how you happen to be in my dominions, and what has become of the girl who scratched your face so badly, and all the other facts in your case. Talk, fast, young man, or I shall be tempted to lower you overboard to the fishes."

"You mustn't address me in that style, Mr. Yattaw," protested the unknown, "or I shall call the police."

"The police?" echoed the bumboat, flushing scornfully. "And what do you suppose I care for the police? No policeman dare to come here unless I invite him, or unless he comes to bring me contributions from the city treasury. You said your name is Eaton, but that was before you had quite taken my measure, young man. You'll tell me the truth now, I'm perfectly certain."

"Yes, I will," avowed the stranger, with an air suggestive of good faith. "I told you the truth in saying that I came from Muskegon, but my name is not Eaton. It is Florian Gilford."

The man who had arrived at Black Jack Yattaw's under such singular circumstances was indeed the rejected wooer of Alphie.

He had narrowly missed perishing during the night, after taking his flight from the floundering sharpie in his row-boat, as related, but hard work and good luck had brought him safely to land.

"I'm the only son, or step-son—it's all the

same—of Derby Gilford, who has a large farm near Muskegon," pursued the rejected wooer. "I left home yesterday morning in a small yacht, accompanied by a young lady to whom I have been paying attention."

Black Jack and his wife exchanged glances of comprehension.

"And on your way up the lake you quarrelled with the young lady in question?" queried Mrs. Yattaw.

"I did, ma'am."

"And threw her overboard?"

"Nothing of the sort, ma'am. Let me tell you what really happened."

Moistening his lips with a drink of whisky Mrs. Yattaw had handed him in silence, he proceeded to give a fairly correct account of his dealings with Alphie, as they are known to the reader.

He was surprised at the horror and disgust his hearers exhibited.

"The idea of your leaving a nice young girl like that to perish, and even shutting her up in the cabin, like a rat in a trap!" commented Black Jack, his dark face rigid with indignation. "You're the meanest man, Florian Gilford, I've seen in five-and-thirty years. You ought to be made into soap!"

"Why, it's ten times worse than a cold-blooded murder," declared Mrs. Yattaw, in a tone of the deepest wrath. "The poor child must have died a thousand deaths while waiting for the yacht to take its final plunge!"

"One moment, mother," suggested Black Jack. "There's no certainty that the yacht has taken its final plunge, and if it has it's by no means certain that Miss Alphie has gone down with it. She may have broken out of the cabin, and saved herself on one of those logs the yacht had encountered, or may have even been picked up by some passing vessel."

"Yes, yes," affirmed Gilford eagerly, anxious to lessen the burden of guilt resting upon him. "She's doubtless safe!"

"But until we know that such is the case," pursued the bumboat, "there is a very serious charge resting upon you. I'll call the patrol wagon, young man, and have you taken to the lock-up."

"You—you don't mean it," stammered Gilford, turning pale.

"Don't I?" sneered Jack, arising. "I'll soon show you."

"Wait, please," pleaded Gilford, in a voice husky with terror, "the girl's all right, I assure you. Besides, what right have you to mix in? What evidence have you against me?"

"Your confession, sir—the facts—"

"Oh, I can take back my confession and deny every charge you can bring against me," declared Gilford, his natural impudence beginning to assert itself. "Besides, you'll find it more to your advantage to work with me than against me."

"That is indeed possible," returned Black Jack. "Is your father wealthy?"

Gilford assented.

"Could he raise five thousand dollars at a day's notice?"

"Yes, or at an hour's notice."

"Give me his address."

The order was obeyed.

"What's your father's telegraphic address?" pursued Jack.

"The same as his letter address—Muskegon, Michigan."

"I'll telegraph him immediately," announced Black Jack, "and let him know that you are in tre-men-di-ous trouble, so that he'll be in Scawgo very early in the morning. In the mean time, I shall have to hold you to bail for your appearance when wanted, in the sum of five thousand dollars. How much money have you on your person?"

"About three thousand dollars."

"Indeed? Let me see it."

Gilford began feeling in his pockets, looking surprised.

"I've taken that wad for safe-keeping," remarked Black Jack, "and find that it amounts to nine hundred and seventy dollars. Where's the rest?"

Ripping a few stitches in the watch pocket of his pantaloons, Gilford produced two thousand dollars in bills of large denomination.

"Sure enough," muttered Black Jack, his eyes lighting up vividly, as his hand closed upon the money. "I'll put it in my safe with the other. It's perfectly absurd for you to be carrying around such a large sum with you, in a place like Scawgo!"

Gilford looked annoyed at being stripped of his cash in this fashion, but he did not dare complain, his treatment of Alphie resting upon his soul like an incubus.

"But why need my father come here?" he ventured.

"Simply to pull you through a very tight place," explained Black Jack. "If Miss Alphie is rescued and comes on to Scawgo, she will, of course, have you arrested for attempted murder or what not, and I shall have to find bail for you, if bail should be taken."

"I judge from all this, Mr. Yattaw, that you intend to befriend me?"

"Of course I do," declared Black Jack.

"Here's twenty dollars of your money for any necessary expenses, and you can have more when you need it. You had better make your home with us during your stay in Scawgo, or at least until this affair with Miss Alphie has been settled, and Mrs. Yattaw will now proceed to get you up an excellent dinner."

He hastened to remove the bonds in which his wife had enveloped their guest, and it was with an almost childish delight that Gilford found himself again at liberty.

"Then I can go where I like?" he asked, arising and stepping about, as if to recover the use of his limbs.

"Of course, sir."

"Then I'll walk up the pier and look around a little," remarked Gilford. "If that girl has been picked up by some ship, she may be coming into port about this time, and I'm going to keep an eye out for her."

"Let me see if she isn't in sight now," proposed Mrs. Yattaw, seizing her marine glass. "She certainly ought to be."

She led the way to a favorite post of observation on the outer side of the bumboat, the two men following her, and proceeded to scan the surface of the lake attentively.

"Yonder comes a Goodrich steamer," she announced, "and any quantity of ships and schooners, but I see nothing of any woman upon them."

"Let me see, ma'am," cried Gilford excitedly.

The glass was handed him, and he pretended to look through it, his whole frame shaking with his agitation.

"Not a sign of her," he muttered, his red face losing color.

"That's because she went down with the sharpie," suggested Mrs. Yattaw.

"Let me see," proposed Jack.

He looked through the instrument a few moments, his brow getting more and more corrugated, and then handed the glass to his wife, touching Gilford on the arm.

"That gal's dead," he declared, with an air which struck his guest as sinister and menacing. "Come into the cabin again, young man. I must have a few words further with you!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLACK JACK'S INQUIRY GETS HOTTER.

It was not without some wonder and a great deal of anxiety that Florian Gilford complied with the bumboat's request.

"Sit down, please," invited Black Jack.

Gilford did so in silence.

Mrs. Yattaw was in the act of turning away to attend to some affair of her own when her husband detained her by a gesture.

"You may sit down too, mother," he said. "We're not yet done with this young gentleman."

Turning to Gilford, the bumboat resumed:

"I presume you comprehend now, young man, that Miss Alphie went down with the sharpie?"

"Oh, no," protested the rejected wooer vehemently.

"It's only too probable," insisted the bumboat sternly. "You look very much to me like a devilish 'sassin! But suppose the gal's alive and comes safely into port? Are you determined to marry her?"

Gilford nodded.

"As much determined to marry her as you are to live?"

The grim, hard look on Gilford's face was even more expressive than his audible declaration.

"Very good, sir. This is a matter in which I can help you," said Black Jack, seating himself near the rejected wooer, "but I'll do so only upon condition that you are perfectly candid with me. Who is this young gal, who has always supposed herself to be your sister, but to whom you have suddenly presented yourself in the character of a wooer?"

"Who is she?" repeated Gilford, his face turning red again.

"Yes, who is she?"

"She's an unknown waif who came into our family—I do not know when or how," answered Gilford, after a few moments of hesitation.

"And yet you are very anxious to marry her," commented Black Jack sneeringly—"this 'unknown waif,' of whom no one can give the history? Are you the sort of man to do this sort of thing, Mr. Gilford?"

The face of the rejected wooer became still redder.

"Why—certainly," he stammered.

"No, you're nothing of the kind," assured Black Jack, in a very decided tone. "Do you mean to tell me that your step-father, Derby Gilford does not know where this young lady came from?"

"Of course father knows all about her."

"And has advised you to marry her?"

Gilford nodded again.

"And has even requested it?"

"I won't deny that my step-father is very anxious for this union to take place."

"Exactly," commented the bumboat, with an audible laugh, "and will you now be so rash as to tell me that your father has advised you to marry this gal without telling you all he knows about her?"

Gilford sat as if stunned by the force of this logic.

"You see, young man," pursued Black Jack, "that you'll have to be candid, and own up to me, now and here, before another word is said, that you know all about the young lady in question, who and what she is, who are her parents, and what you are to gain by this marriage."

Gilford writhed a few moments in his chair with the air of a fox in a trap.

"Well, yes," he then said—"I'll own that I know all about the girl, or I wouldn't be willing to marry her."

"Very good, sir. Isn't she an heiress?"

"It'll be nothing very criminal, I think, if I admit the fact."

"Then her parents are people of some consequence, to say the least?"

"Naturally enough, sir."

"Then you are marrying for money?"

"Well, why not?"

"But isn't there another thing you are marrying for?" pursued the bumboat. "Isn't it part of the plot to put this young lady between your father and the wrath or vengeance of her parents?"

Gilford stared at his questioner a few moments in silence.

"You're a wiry dog, I see," he then muttered, in a tone of sullen disgust. "But I'll not hesitate on this question, after answering so many."

"Then the marriage in question is really designed to make things smooth between the young lady's parents and your step-father?"

Gilford assented.

"And possibly to prevent your step-father from being the subject of a criminal prosecution?"

"That may be."

"Very good," muttered Black Jack, once more, in the most decided of tones. "Will you now tell me, young man, just who the lady is, and who are her parents?"

The dissatisfied look of Florian Gilford deepened to a frown.

"I don't know that you are my father confessor, Mr. Yattaw," he declared. "You'll have to excuse me from saying anything further on these subjects."

"Tell me at least if her parents reside in Scawgo?"

"No, they do not."

"Are they foreigners, then?"

"I'll tell you nothing more whatever."

"Pshaw! you won't be so short-sighted," muttered Black Jack, springing to his feet and stepping behind his bar. "I'll mix a couple of my favorite drinks, and we'll sit down and enjoy them, like good friends, while you give me further particulars, in order that I may be useful to you."

He returned to his seat at the end of a few moments, with two tumblers partly filled with some highly colored liquid, one of which he handed to Gilford.

"Here's success to your schemes, young man," resumed the bumboat, with a sly glance at his wife, "and here's to the hope that this nice punch will loosen your tongue."

"I don't think that's likely, sir," returned Gilford, as Jack emptied his glass, "but I must say it's good, and I can do no less than imitate your example."

The deed followed the word.

"Oh, that'll make you talk," declared Black Jack, with suppressed jubilation, returning the tumblers to the bar. "And now let's go and see if that gal's coming."

He led the way, glass in hand, to his favorite lookout, his wife and Gilford following him.

"Ah, now it begins to look like it," came from him, as soon as he had placed the instrument to his eye. "Yonder comes a schooner, and there are two men and two women on the fore-castle who appear to be looking in this direction."

"Give me a peep, please," requested Gilford, with wild impatience.

The bumboat complied, and both he and his wife started at the sudden pallor which invaded Gilford's face at his first glance through the instrument.

"There she is! sure enough!" he gasped.

"The youngest of the two women, who stand's near a young man?" demanded Black Jack, excitedly.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know who the oldest of the two gentlemen is?" pursued the bumboat.

Gilford shook his head, lowering the glass.

"Well, I do," avowed Black Jack. "He's Colonel Archy Southman, who's coming here to see Sir Charles Depworth, according to the newspapers. But come."

He led the way back to the cabin, motioning Gilford, who staggered and seemed weak, to be seated.

"Will you have another drink, sir?" he asked. Gilford made an attempt to reply in the negative, but even this one short word was too great a tax for his powers.

He sat a few moments as if paralyzed, and then his head sunk upon his breast, his eyes remaining wide open, and a stony look of horror coming out on his features.

"Since he won't tell me who the gal is," muttered Black Jack, advancing to his support,

"I'll keep him here till I've had a chance to communicate with her on the subject. Help me get him back to the bed mother."

The transfer was made in silence, and a key turned upon the sleeper, when the couple retraced their steps to the bar.

"He's a nass of the stupidest kind," muttered Black Jack, "or he wouldn't have taken the same dose twice."

"That's because he is excited, Jack," returned Mrs. Yattaw. "He's really scared."

"Well, he has reason to be," commented the bumboat, grimly. "Since that gal has been reskied, she, or some of her friends will pay big money for the capture of this reprobate, and take him off out of our way, to jail or otherwise, so that I can retain as my own the money he now has on deposit with me. See?"

The smile of Mrs. Yattaw was a sufficient answer.

"On the other hand," pursued Black Jack, "if the gal don't wish to arrest him—and this is likely enough, seeing that women are so timid about appearing in court—we'll none the less tell him a mighty good story of his perils, and let him run, minus his cash, and he'll run so fast, no doubt, that we shall never see no more of him till about six weeks after the day of judgment. Do you see this point, mother?"

"I should smile if I didn't."

"But this isn't the only point I'm going to play in this game," continued Black Jack emphatically, stepping behind the bar and drawing paper and ink toward him. "I'm going to send a telegram to that old step-father in Muskegon!"

"To Derby Gilford?"

"Yes, mother—a few awful lines that'll just about shake the daylight out of him!"

"But what will you tell him?" asked Mrs. Yattaw, as her husband drew a blank under his gaze and began filling it out.

"I'll tell him that his step-son is just now the picture of an animated sweat-box," replied Black Jack, "and that he'd better show up in Scawgo about as quick as thunder, lightning, hail and rain, with a dozen bad eggs thrown in, can move him!"

He wrote away a couple of minutes, tearing up two or three unsatisfactory beginnings, but at length reached a conclusion that responded to his thought, and read it for his wife's approval.

"Yes, that'll fetch the old man here by the fu'st train," was her comment. "Shall I take it to the office?"

"Yes, and for once please be quick about it."

Taking some change from the drawer, Mrs. Yattaw hurriedly departed.

She had been gone scarcely a minute when a stranger tripped lightly across the gangway and marched into Black Jack's presence with an air suggestive of business.

"Mr. Yattaw, I believe?" questioned the new-comer after a glance into the face of the redoubtable captain.

"The same, sir."

"Mr. Jack Yattaw?"

"Yes, sir, the only Yattaw that ever existed."

"I want to have a little talk with you," pursued the stranger, throwing down a card. "This is my name, sir."

Black Jack glanced at the card, which read as follows:

"DERBY GILFORD,

"Muskegon, Michigan."

"The devil! This is quite quick returns!" was Black Jack's comment.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BUMBOATER SCENTS CROOKEDNESS.

LEANING across the bar, Derby Gilford looked inquiringly into the imperturbable countenance of Black Jack Yattaw.

He was a man not far from fifty years of age, but he appeared much older, being wrinkled and emaciated, as if he had never eaten a square meal, or lacked the digestion necessary to get any utility from it.

He was not only rustic looking, unkempt, and unshaven, but his clothes fitted him no better than if they had been borrowed from a scarecrow.

"Excuse me, sir. I didn't quite catch your remark," he said.

"I was merely saying that the weather is hot," responded Black Jack. "You seem warm and flushed, Mr. Gilford," he added, securing the visitor's card in his vest pocket. "What will you take, sir?"

"A lemonade, if you please, with a mere dash of whisky in it."

The demand was duly honored, and the bumboat sat down near his guest, with the air of placing himself wholly at his disposal.

"You are well planted here, Mr. Yattaw, for knowing what takes place on the lake and along the water front," remarked Derby Gilford, after tasting his lemonade. "No vessel of any kind can come into port without your seeing it."

"If I happen to be looking," supplemented Black Jack.

"Have you seen a neat little sharpie hereabouts at any time yesterday or to-day?" pur-

sued Derby Gilford, going deeper into his beverage.

"No, sir," answered the bumboat. "The fact is, the sharpie in question has met with a very singular accident and has gone to the bottom."

Mr. Gilford uttered a wild protest of incredulity, looking as if he had seen a ghost.

"It's a fact, I assure you," continued Black Jack, with a very successful attempt at appearing supernaturally calm. "She ran into a raft of logs, and one of the logs knocked a hole in the sharpie about the size of your body, and she went to the bottom in half a minute."

"And my son?" gasped Gilford.

"Made his escape in the row-boat."

"And my daughter?"

"Was picked up this morning, after being afloat all night on a log, by Colonel Southman, of the Wizard Silver Mine, who has come up the lake in his schooner to visit Sir Charles Depworth, who is expected every minute from England."

The tumbler fell from Gilford's hand to the floor, and he sunk back in his chair so white and inert that the bumboat thought he had fainted.

"Cursed fatality!" he gasped.

"Explain yourself, sir."

"The loss of the sharpie, I mean in such an extraordinary fashion," exclaimed Gilford, making a desperate effort to recover and retain control of himself. "I never heard anything like it."

"When did you arrive in Scawgo, Mr. Gilford?" asked Black Jack carelessly, as he set about preparing another lemonade.

"Just a few hours ago, sir."

"Did your son know of your intention to take this trip?"

"Well, no. He expected I would remain at home until his return."

"Then what started you off so suddenly? Did you have a premonition that something was wrong?"

"I suppose that was it, sir."

"Or was it," insinuated Black Jack, in his quietest manner, "that you were anxious about the proposed marriage between your step-son and your reputed daughter?"

The visitor again started violently, his hand trembling so that he was hardly able to take the fresh glass of lemonade the bumboat now handed him.

"Ah, you know—"

"All that tongue can tell, Mr. Gilford," assured Black Jack—"all save one little point, which I'm sure you'll tell me."

"Certainly—if I can. What is it?"

"I'd like to know just who are the gal's real parents."

The old man started again, the last vestige of color leaving his face.

His lips parted, and it was evident he wanted to say something, but no sound came from him.

"Come, come, sir!" enjoined the bumboat. "I am too well posted in regard to all your affairs for you to attempt to deceive me in regard to Miss Alphie's parentage. Who and what is she?"

"I—I don't know, Mr. Yattaw," answered Gilford. "She was left at our house one night by a band of Gypsies."

"What you say won't agree at all with what your son told me."

"Ah, Florian has been here?"

"Yes, very early this morning, after being afloat all night in his row-boat. He arrived in his under-garments, wet, cold and hungry, and asked me to feed and warm him, as also to lend him a suit of clothes and twenty dollars, which I did with pleasure."

"Not seeing him, or anything of the sharpie, Mr. Yattaw," returned Gilford, "I could do no less than come here and make inquiries. I am very much obliged to you for your kindness, sir," he added, arising, after finishing his lemonade, "and shall be even more so if you can give me a bed till morning."

"Well, that's not exactly in my line," said Black Jack, looking him over as if seeking an explanation of the odd suggestion. "Why don't you go to one of our popular hotels?"

"And be laughed at as a 'Gentleman from Wayback,' Mr. Yattaw?" retorted Gilford. "No, no, sir; I'm no such man. But I have a number of reasons for wishing to quarter myself here, and will frankly mention them."

"Oh, that's unnecessary—"

"Nevertheless, sir, I beg to take you into my confidence, because I am in need of your assistance. I am going now to look for a small sloop—to replace the lost sharpie—and I want to lodge with you in order to be handy to the shipping. Will you accommodate me, Mr. Yattaw?"

"Certainly, if my doing so will oblige you."

"Thanks. If my son should show up here again, tell him to remain till I return. Above all, sir, please not say a word to any one about my presence in Chicago, unless to some one who calls to inquire for me."

"All right, Mr. Gilford," returned Black Jack. "Depend upon my discretion. Must you be going so soon?"

The visitor assented.

"But I can't let you go, Mr. Gilford, till we have had a social glass together, and I have wished you success in your projects. I have some fine old California port here which I never bring out except for my best friends, and I can't let you go till you've tried it."

"Oh, I am with you," declared the visitor, "and only too glad to accept your kind offer."

"In the mean time," suggested Black Jack, bustling around behind his bar, "what do you say to telling me who Miss Alphie really is? Enough was said by your son on this subject to make me intensely curious, and I shall really be offended if you do not tell me."

The lips of the old man closed like the jaws of a trap.

"I must decline to chatter, even to you, Mr. Yattaw, at least for the present," he declared, in a voice which attested that all further appeals would be wasted upon him.

"Oh, in that case, excuse me," said the bumboat. "Some other time will answer."

He finished pouring the wine of which he had spoken, and in another moment had touched glasses with Gilford, and gone through the farce of wishing him good luck in all his enterprises.

The result can be foreseen.

Mr. Gilford had no sooner swallowed the wine offered him, than he felt bad enough to resume his seat, and he had scarcely resumed his seat, when he displayed all the signs of being in a sound slumber.

At this moment Mrs. Yattaw returned from her errand, and started in surprise at the spectacle she found under her gaze.

"What have we here, Jack?" she asked.

"The answer to the telegram you've just sent to Muskegon."

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"This man is Derby Gilford, and he's a chip off the old block in all that concerns the parentage of Miss Alphie."

"Then he wouldn't tell you who she really is?"

"No more'n his son would, and so I resolved to give him just such a dose as his son has taken. Keep an eye out for intruders while I go through his pockets and papers."

The search was promptly finished, but not without many an ejaculation of astonishment.

From at least half a dozen hiding-places were brought forth wads of money, the whole footing up to nearly five thousand dollars, all of which the bumboat secured on his own person.

"And that's not the most singular thing about him," continued Black Jack, after reporting the amount of money. "Here's a letter from Dan the Swatter, written day before yesterday, inviting Gilford to come to Chicago to consult with him as to the best ways and means of cleaning out Sir Charles Depworth, who is about to arrive here with untold millions!"

"Then the man's really onto a big game, Jack?" returned Mrs. Yattaw, after expressing her astonishment.

"As you see, mother. He pretended to be here on account of his anxiety about the proposed marriage of his step-son and Miss Alphie, but I saw that was gammon. Help me get him into one of those stowaways."

The unconscious man was duly removed to one of several narrow bunks in which drunks were allowed, under favoring circumstances, to sleep off their liquor, and the husband and wife returned to the cabin to discuss further the singular turn their affairs had taken.

"It seems from this that the man's really here for a big piece of crookedness!" observed Mrs. Yattaw, proceeding to make herself a lemonade.

"There can be no doubt about that, mother," replied the bumboat. "Just what it is, is a question we shall have to decide by waiting and watching. I told him his son had been here for food, clothes, and a loan of twenty dollars, but I didn't tell him the young man is sleeping the sleep of the unjust within a few yards of him."

"And what is your idea, Jack?"

"To keep the father and son drugged till inquiry is made for them, or something else happens. The old man spoke about expecting visitors."

"And if they come?"

"We can give him the antidote and bring him around, and let the drugging pass for a sudden illness that we know nothing about. The money I've merely taken for safe-keeping. Of course we'll get onto his racket, and that of any one who calls for him. There's an ill-wind abroad which is going to blow us great good, mother. Our new bumboat seems to be just now the center of a very considerable web, and we'll take good care to play the spider to some advantage."

And with this he proceeded to get his strange craft in order for the wonted nightly reception.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BOGUS DETECTIVE.

THE afternoon was drawing to a close when Dan the Swatter and Bart Wyser left the former's house, and boarded a Van Buren street car going eastward.

Transferring themselves by grip-car to the southwest corner of Lincoln Park, they sauntered past the Parade Ground toward the lake, eventually taking possession of a rustic bench overlooking the water from the extreme edge of the New Breakwater Drive.

"Well, as I thought," muttered the Swatter, "all danger from our adventure of the morning is over. Either the baronet is not inclined to make any complaint, or the party who recovered his bag has serious doubts about furnishing the necessary legal proofs for our conviction."

"I fancy both of these considerations are working in our favor," returned Wyser, with smiling equanimity. "Who saw you take the bag from the carriage? And who, except 'Captain Crockletown'—whoever he may be—saw you deposit the same in the pantry? They're not such fools as to arrest us, Dan. We should slip through their fingers, and our escape would be another feather in our caps."

"I agree with you, Bart," declared the Swatter, "and hence we can enter on this new scheme with perfect freedom."

"I do hope the boat 'll come, Dan," remarked Bart Wyser, after a keen look up the coast and immediately around him.

"It's sure to appear," assured the Swatter. "Don't get impatient. I see it now, I think."

Drawing a small, but excellent field-glass from his pocket, he clapped it to his eye.

"Sure enough," he added.

Looking sharply through the glass a moment, he passed it to Wyser.

The object of their scenting was a small sloop, which, under jib and mainsail, was coming swiftly toward them from the north, and was already within half a mile of them, and not more than fifty rods from the shore.

"That's the craft I was telling you about," declared Dan, restoring his glass to his pocket. "I know it by a patch on the sail. It has been here almost every week for a month, and was here just a week ago at this hour. There's only one man aboard, and he's always the same. He comes ashore with a bag under his arm which contains some heavy substance."

"Who is he?" queried Wyser.

"That's his secret, Bart, but I think he's a thief who's robbing some miners who've struck it rich up north'ard. Be that as it may, what he brings in that bag is solid silver."

"How do you know?"

"I followed him to a jeweler and pawnbroker on Clark street—to Old Mosher's—and saw him empty his bag on the counter."

The eyes of Bart Wyser glistened.

"Have you heard of any new discovery of silver north'ard, Dan?" he asked.

"Only that they're finding a great deal of silver in the famous Wizard Mine, on an island near the north shore of Lake Superior."

"But this man can't come here every week from Lake Superior," objected Wyser.

"No, but he may come a short distance, and have a connection by express with the thief or thieves for whom he is selling. Of course, we'll squeeze his secret out of him," added Dan, leading the way toward the spot where the unknown was in the habit of landing. "Follow me, Bart, keeping me and the boat in view, and be ready to second me in any way necessary."

Keeping his eye on the sloop, and conforming his movements to it, the Swatter met the newcomer at the very moment he lowered his sails and the keel of his craft grated on the beach a short distance north of the Water Works.

"I'm coming aboard to see you, stranger," announced Dan, with a nod intended as a salutation, climbing on the bowsprit and moving aft with the agility of the spider. "The matter is very important."

Then, on reaching the movable deck, he added, lowering his voice to a whisper:

"There's a gang of thieves waiting to rob you."

The stranger did not seem to be surprised at the declaration.

Dropping into an easy attitude on the seat encircling the cockpit, he gave his visitor a sharp, uneasy look of inquiry.

He was a rough-looking man, evidently a day-laborer, some forty years of age, with nothing noticeable in his aspect and manners, if we except a low cunning which gleamed from his eyes.

"It's merely that they've got track of this bag," continued the Swatter, with an insinuating smile, indicating an object lying in the cockpit, and seating himself near it. "They've spotted your secret, with your many recent trips to the city, and are anxious to share your good fortune."

The new-comer sat the picture of consternation.

"What would you do?" he asked.

"Well, you've nothing to do except to place yourself in my care," answered Dan. "I'm Bolly Blair, the famous detective."

The man looked even more scared than before, showing that he was familiar with the name.

"Of course you must talk to me frankly," pursued Dan, "just as a client talks to his lawyer, or a patient to his doctor, or your case 'll be a bad one! You're on your way to Old Mosher, I suppose?"

A wondering assent was given him.

"What have you in this bag?"

"Silver, sir."

"From the Wizard Mine, of course?"

The man assented.

"What's your name?"

"Simon Gorkle."

"Where do you live?"

Gorkle had answered Dan's inquiries with evident reluctance, and he now hesitated.

"What's the use of these questions?" he demanded.

"You'll soon learn, if you don't answer them," answered the Swatter menacingly. "I want you to tell me who and what you are, and how you came by this silver."

"And if I refuse?"

"I'll arrest you and take you to the lock-up!" Gorkle paled at the threat.

"What if I consent?"

"You've nothing to fear," declared Dan, winking knowingly. "I'll give you full protection after hearing the facts. Where do you live, Mr. Gorkle?"

"At Waukegan."

"How long have you lived there?"

"About six months."

"Or just about as long as you've been making these trips with the silver?"

"Precisely."

"Where did you live before you came to Waukegan?" pursued Dan.

"On an island in Lake Superior—Silver Island in fact, which is just south of Isle Royale."

"Now tell me all about this silver," insinuated Dan, handing out cigars and offering a light. "Give me all the facts in your own way, Mr. Gorkle, without waiting to be questioned."

"Well," began Gorkle, with the air of resigning himself to a dire necessity, "the silver comes from the Wizard Mine, which is owned by Colonel Southman. My brother, Tom Gorkle, is one of the miners who has been employed there for years. He began stealing silver last March. He sends it by boat to Ashland, where it is expressed to me at Waukegan. My business is to bring it here and sell it, and return three-fourths of the cash to my brother, retaining one-fourth for myself."

"I see," commented the Swatter, with assumed carelessness. "What's the name of the man who brings the silver from the island to Ashland?"

"Goff Dotter."

"Then there are three of you in the secret of the stealing?"

Gorkle nodded.

"And no more?"

"No, sir."

"Don't Old Mosher suspect anything?"

"Yes, he suspects the silver is stolen, but, as I sell it to him under its value, and he melts it up as fast as he gets it, he has not asked me too many questions, and has of course kept silent about our dealings!"

Gorkle reflected a few moments, and then added:

"I may as well say a word or two more, Mr. Blair. I shall have no more silver to sell at present. My supplies have been cut off at their source. My brother writes me that there is talk of selling the Wizard Mine to a great English syndicate of which Sir Charles Depworth is the chairman. Haven't you heard anything about this project?"

"To be sure," admitted the Swatter, his features glowing with delight.

"My brother writes me," continued Gorkle, "that Colonel Southman is coming to Chicago immediately to see the baronet, and will bring with him, in a schooner, the output of the 'Wizard' for the last ten months, which amounts to more than a million. Ah, heavens—"

"What is it, man?"

"Why, there's the schooner now, with Colonel Southman himself, and also my brother," cried Gorkle, staring at the handsome craft that was creeping along the shore under easy sail less than fifty rods distant. "Look, Mr. Blair! On that craft is over a million in bar silver."

The Swatter clapped his glass to his eye, scrutinizing the schooner intently, as also those aboard of it, including the colonel and his wife, with Harry Southman and Alphonse Gilford, who were plainly visible, standing in a group on the fore-castle, just as Black Jack Yattaw had seen them, busy with the contemplation of their surroundings.

"They'll have to go on to the harbor, as the pier is full, unless they tie to Black Jack's bumboat," muttered the Swatter, with suppressed excitement. "Who's that young man with the colonel?"

"That's his son, Harry Southman, who is also the superintendent of the mine."

"And the girl?"

"She is either Harry's wife or his betrothed, to judge from their attitudes."

"That's likely, Gorkle. You had better be off for Old Mosher's now to sell your silver."

"What! I'm free?" cried Gorkle, with a flush of joy and relief.

"Of course you are," returned Dan. "I can't be seen with you, either in the street or at the jeweler's, and you mustn't say a word about me to any human being, but I'll keep you under my eye and no one shall harm you."

"What'll be your charge, sir?"

"Oh, it won't cost you a cent as I'm paid by the city," replied Dan carelessly, arising and

taking his way ashore over the bowsprit, carrying the anchor with him. "Fetch your bag, and we'll be moving."

They were soon on the beach, the Swatter carrying the anchor a couple of rods up the beach and bedding one of its flukes in the sand.

"Of course the sloop will be quite safe here in your absence," continued Dan. "Go quietly aboard of it when you return, and wait here for me. You can be off now, and you needn't look back, as I don't want the thieves to catch on to what we're doing. I'll follow near enough to keep you covered."

Gorkle hurried away with his bag under his arm, taking care to keep his gaze fixed in the direction he was going.

The Swatter made a pretense of following him, but soon returned to Wyser.

"Such a discovery as I've made through that simpleton, Bart!" he ejaculated. "You see that schooner, which is sweeping past the Government pier, bound for the harbor?"

Wyser assented.

"Well, it's that of Colonel Southman, of the Wizard Silver Mine, who has come here to complete the proposed sale of the property to the syndicate headed by Sir Charles Depworth, so that we now have two gigantic piles to rake in, if possible—that of Sir Charles and that of the colonel."

He hastened to reveal his discoveries to Wyser, who fully shared his excitement.

"And this silver scheme can of course be worked in connection with the other," commented Wyser, "so that we now have a chance to make the crowning haul of our lives, and one that will enable us to retire from business. Shall we go at once for the colonel?"

"Yes, on the instant."

"But how, Dan?"

"We must of course be guided by circumstances," replied the Swatter, leading the way in the direction the schooner had gone, "but I'll call on Colonel Southman without a moment's delay. Just watch from the nearest and best point available, as before, and be ready to second me in any way you can."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LOVERS IN CHICAGO.

At the very moment when Florian Gilford, looking from Black Jack Yattaw's bumboat, witnessed the arrival of Alphonse in Chicago, the fair girl was congratulating her betrothed on his escape, and that of his parents, from the machinations of a portion of his crew.

"Of course all danger from these men is now past?" she concluded.

"Yes, Alphonse," replied Harry. "Now that we have reached port, where a word or a turn of the hand would call the police to our aid, our recent serious peril maybe regarded as eliminated. What is still more to the point," he added, smiling a caress, "the menaces of Florian Gilford have now vanished into nothingness, or remain a mere shadow of your past."

The girl sighed profoundly, a tremor traversing her frame.

"I wish I could think so," she murmured, her eyes scanning the scene before her uneasily.

"But there can be little doubt that he has reached Chicago safely, and that he has arrived at least several hours ahead of us."

"But will he not think that you have gone to the bottom with the sharpie?"

"Yes, unless he kept looking back at her as long as he remained within sight, and noticed that she did not go to the bottom."

"Even in that case," suggested Harry, thoughtfully, "he can have no certainty as to who would pick you up, or when, or in what direction you would be carried. There is little likelihood that he will watch for your arrival in Chicago, or that any such watching would result in his getting track of you. You may consider yourself rid of him forever."

"Unless he turns up again, like the bad penny he is," returned Alphonse, with cheerful archness. "In any case, I am not likely to worry about him till he gives me positive cause for doing so."

"I am glad to find you such a sensible girl," said Mrs. Southman, who, with her husband, had approached the young couple in time to hear Alphonse's concluding words. "What should you care for the threats or ill-will of any such party, after finding such good friends as we'll all be to you?"

"Very little, I assure you, dear mamma," returned Alphonse, as her arm stole around Mrs. Southman's waist. "I am too well protected now for even Florian Gilford to harm me."

"And in a few days you will be even further removed from that man's persecutions than you are now," continued Mrs. Southman, caressing her. "To-morrow afternoon, or as soon as we have landed our silver, I shall hope to win your consent to an instant union with Harry, and from that hour you will have nothing to fear from any source whatever. If, however, you wish to wait a week as talked, to see what measures can be taken for the discovery of your parents, and what the lawyers advise you to do with Derby Gilford, we shall all consent to your doing so, and will give you every assist-

ance possible, taking good care to shield you from all harm."

"I will wait a week in the hope of solving the great question of my parentage," said Alphonse. "In this time, with the aid of a good lawyer, there may be found a way of bringing Denny Gilford to a confession of all he knows on the subject, and I venture to hope and believe that he can restore me immediately to my parents. Florian said, in so many words, that they are expected in Chicago from one day to another, and surely, when once we know who they are, we shall be able, with or without the aid of detectives, to place ourselves in communication with them."

"All this is perfectly certain," commented the colonel, "and hence Alphonse shall do as she pleases."

"Speaking of detectives, papa," suggested Mrs. Southman, "had we not better send to Bolly Blair, who is doing wonderful things in that line, and have him send three or four of his men here, as a special protection of the silver until it is landed? He has an office in the Rookery, which is open at all hours of the day and night, and he or some one who represents him can be found in a few minutes."

The colonel took the proposition into serious consideration a moment, and then shook his head.

"It is unnecessary," he decided. "About half of our men, including the cook, are faithful to us, and it is unlikely that the rest will undertake to make us any trouble, now that we are safe in port. If this trouble hadn't arisen with them, we should all land at once and go to the Palmer House, where, it is understood, Sir Charles Depworth will take lodgings on his arrival."

"But as it is, Archy?" demanded Mrs. Southman.

"Very naturally, as things are," returned the colonel, "we shall all make the schooner our headquarters until after the silver has been landed. There's no question of our going to a hotel till the treasure has been removed to a place of safety."

This decision met with general approval.

"But of course you and Alphonse can go ashore for a few hours," added the colonel, turning to Harry, "and I'll give you an important errand as an excuse for doing so."

"Let us have it, sir," said Harry, with smiling frankness, "for Alphonse is very anxious to take a look at the city, and I am equally anxious to show it to her."

"Well, I want you to call at the Palmer House, and inquire if Sir Charles Depworth has already arrived there," declared the colonel. "If he has, Harry, you'll see him, and tell him where I am, and perhaps he'll come off to the schooner at once, and talk up the proposed sale of the 'Wizard' with me. Should he prefer to wait until morning, you'll advise with him as to the hour when he may be expected."

"We'll attend to the matter, sir," returned the son, with a fond glance at his betrothed. "Is there anything else I can do?"

"Yes, you can take Alphonse to one of the theaters," suggested Colonel Southman, "and bring her back here after the performance. This commission, as you will see at a glance," he added, with a genial smile, his eyes lingering upon the handsome couple with admiring affection, "is in the nature of a recompense, Harry, for the safe execution of the other."

"I'll attend to them both, sir," assured Harry, while Alphonse's eyes glowed like stars in anticipation of the treat offered her.

"Then speak to the mate, and let him have his boat in readiness," said the colonel. "You need not delay your departure for a moment."

CHAPTER XXII.

PLAYING A SINGULAR GAME.

In accordance with his programme, Dan the Swatter was aboard of the silver-laden schooner almost as soon as it had rounded-to in the Outer Harbor.

He gave his first attention to Tom Gorkle, the thieving miner, whom he recognized readily through his marked resemblance to his brother.

Tom was busy on the deck, figuring, as mate, in the midst of a group of sailors, making everything shipshape, and he cast upon the Swatter a sharp and anxious glance, which the latter noticed with keen satisfaction.

"One moment, Gorkle," said Dan, in a tone of authority, beckoning the dishonest miner toward him, after securing to the taffrail the painter of the boat in which he had come off from the nearest shore. "I wish to speak to you."

Tom Gorkle responded to the summons with an uneasiness that was quite visible to the eyes of the Swatter, if to no one else.

Dan readily saw, in fact, that the man's whole thought at the moment was of the silver he had been stealing from his employer.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Gorkle," greeted Dan, taking the miner by the hand. "Welcome to Chicago! As a warm friend of your brother, who has just quitted me, I am pleased to witness your safe arrival, and hope you've had a pleasant voyage from your island."

"Excellent, thank you," replied Gorkle, with a wonder he could not conceal, as he looked the stranger over and mentally demanded who and what he could be. "Why is not Simon here with you?"

"Caution!" and Dan sunk his voice to an impressive whisper. "Simon has gone to Old Mosher's to sell that last batch of silver you sent him, but he has deputed me to bring you to him in due course."

The miner paled at the words, and looked around quickly to assure himself that none of his comrades were within hearing.

"Why did the colonel bring you to Chicago?" pursued Dan. "Certainly, not to help work the schooner, as you're no sailor."

"Oh, yes. I was formerly a sailor on all the great lakes and both oceans. But I have also come here as a practical miner, in order to answer any questions Sir Charles Depworth may care to ask about the 'Wizard.' Having worked in the mine, you see, a couple of years, I am fully competent to tell the baronet just what he's buying."

"Exactly," commented Dan, surveying the man thoughtfully. "As Simon isn't here to introduce me, allow me to introduce myself. I'm Bolly Blair, the well-known detective, and my business here is very important."

Tom Gorkle became more uneasy at these declarations than ever.

"For the present, and until further orders, Mr. Gorkle," pursued Dan, "do not allow a man to leave the schooner, or to come aboard. Where is Colonel Southman?"

"In the cabin, sir."

"Have the goodness to present me to him, and then leave us," ordered Dan, with an air of authority which closed the door to any sort of hesitation. "Could you handle the schooner, as its commander?"

"As well as it can be handled by any captain who sails out of Chicago."

"Good," commented Dan, in a guarded tone. "I will see you later, and need only say now that I shall expect you to co-operate with me in a number of measures which relate to this cargo of silver."

"Certainly, sir—quite at your service," returned Tom Gorkle, with the air of being completely dominated by his extraordinary visitor.

"This is all I have to say till I've consulted the colonel," added Dan. "Take me to him."

Inclining himself in silence, and making a resolute effort to conceal his trepidation, Tom Gorkle led the way into the cabin, where Colonel Southman and his wife were seated.

"Detective Blair, sir," announced the faithless mate, endeavoring to conceal his nervousness under a bustling air. "He has something of importance to say to you."

The colonel and Mrs. Southman received the visitor politely, inviting him to be seated, and Tom Gorkle turned away.

"See that the men remain quietly in the fore-castle, Mr. Gorkle," ordered the colonel, "and remember that not a man of them is to go ashore until he gets special permission."

"I comprehend, sir," replied the mate, and with this he vanished.

"I'm glad you've given that order, colonel," said the Swatter, seating himself opposite the husband and wife. "The fact is, some of the worst rogues in the city have learned of your proposed arrival, with the accumulated outputs of the Wizard, and a number of them are now plotting to seize your silver."

His hearers exchanged significant glances.

"Did I not tell you so, Archy?" demanded Mrs. Southman with a smile. "Did I not foresee that it would be impossible for us to come here, with these bars of silver, without at once attracting many an evil eye to what we are doing, as secret as we have tried to be?"

"Well, no harm's done, and nothing is likely to come of it, seeing that Mr. Blair has hurried so promptly to our assistance. I hope in the course of to-morrow to have our silver in some bank—"

"And until then, colonel, you needn't give yourself the least trouble, as I am taking every necessary measure," interrupted the Swatter. "With your permission, I'll bring aboard a few young men in due course, and will guard both you and your bullion carefully until our services are no longer needed."

He stepped lightly to the companionway, closing the entrance, and came back to the husband and wife with a nervous eagerness that was readily accepted as an interest in their situation.

"To be frank with you, colonel," he resumed, inclining his head nearer and speaking in a whisper, "this mate of yours is not what you think. He has been stealing your silver at the rate of sixty or seventy pounds weekly ever since last March. A man named Goff Dotter has been making constant trips between your island and Ashland, from which point the silver has been expressed to Waukegan to Simon Gorkle, formerly in your employ, who has been here every week in a sloop to dispose of the plunder."

The colonel was not a little startled by these revelations, which of course placed the pretended detective in a most favorable light, giving him an air of thorough authenticity.

"Go on, Mr. Blair," begged Mrs. Southman, with anxious eagerness.

"There's little more to be said," continued the Swatter. "The essential is that this brother, Simon Gorkle, has been arrested, and I've sent a man to Ashland to arrest Goff Dotter. Your mate will be arrested at the right moment—after I have questioned him—and in the mean time you mustn't give him the slightest hint of our discoveries. There's a conspiracy here which looks to nothing less than the seizure of all your bullion."

Mrs. Southman's face blanched at these statements, and her husband looked astounded.

"Can it be, Mr. Blair," asked the latter, "that the conspirators you speak of have an understanding with those aboard the schooner?"

"How aboard the schooner, colonel?"

"Why, a part of my crew has acted very queerly ever since we sailed from Silver Island, and only my watchfulness and that of my son has prevented them from making an attempt to seize the schooner and the silver!"

"What have they done, sir?"

"They've made two different attempts to run the schooner ashore by steering in a different direction than that laid down for them," explained the colonel, "and have been guilty of all sorts of mutinous and suspicious conduct, disobeying orders, gathering in groups and consulting in whispers, and so on."

"I think there's no connection between these men and those I referred to," said the Swatter. "The probability is that Tom Gorkle and some of his associates have been tempted by the silver, without the least reference to the Chicago crooks to whom I've alluded."

"Do you know who these crooks are, sir?" inquired the colonel.

"Oh, yes. One of them is the notorious Dan Swatter, and another is Dan's particular chum, Bart Wyser. Probably you know something about them?"

"Very little, I confess," returned Colonel Southman, "and the fact is not to be wondered at, considering that my wife and I have been almost constantly absent from Chicago for several years."

"Fortunately, as I was saying," pursued Dan, "all the threads of this plot are now in my hands, and all you have to do is to do nothing. I will act in due course, taking all the necessary measures for the defeat of the plotters. What is the value of your silver?"

"A little more than half a million," answered Colonel Southman.

"The papers have given larger figures, sir."

"That was to be expected, but the facts are as I tell you, and I am sorry to add that the actual figures do not represent a great deal of profit. As you may be aware, the richest veins of the Wizard are far below the level of the lake, and we have to pump a great deal of water to get at them."

"But half a million, colonel," said Dan, with suppressed excitement, "is a great deal of money. In what shape is it?"

"In bars, of course."

"And what measures have you taken for its safe-keeping?"

"Oh, I've put the bars into stout plank boxes, and have chained the boxes to the sides and bottom of the hold," answered the colonel—"very rude measures, I confess, but probably as efficient as any quantity of bolts and bars would have been, as not a blow can be struck for the removal of the chains without sending an echo throughout the ship."

"Nevertheless, I think you are very fortunate to have reached port in safety," declared the Swatter, arising, "and we had better take instant steps to paralyze any schemes which may be under foot for seizing the silver or the schooner. What measures have you taken for the night?"

"Not any, sir," replied the colonel, "except to keep the whole crew in the fore-castle, with the idea of using those who are for us to control those who are against us. My wife suggested that we send to you for three or four men, as a special protection for the night, but I didn't think it necessary."

"Well, it is necessary," assured the Swatter. "Do you expect any visitors during the evening?"

"Not unless Sir Charles Depworth should call upon me."

"Then he knows you are here?"

"I have sent my son to him with this information," explained the colonel, "and also to tell him that I shall be pleased to see him here, to-night, if he cares to call so promptly."

"He, too, has become an object of much unpleasant attention," remarked the Swatter, averting his eyes to hide the villainous gleam in them, "and you must really allow me, colonel, to take the necessary measures for the protection of yourself and your visitors. Your crew seems to have been divided—some of them being for you, and some against you. Will you give me the particulars?"

"With pleasure."

Drawing a slip of paper from one of his vest pockets, the colonel unfolded it and called the attention of the bogus detective to two short columns of names upon it.

"These," he said, putting his thumb on the right hand column, "are the names of the men who wanted to run the schooner ashore, so that they could make their escape with the silver."

"I see, sir."

"And these names on the left," continued Colonel Southman, "are those of the men who refused to have anything to do with the plot, and who remained faithful to me."

"You will see," he added, "that we have been about equally divided, and that's why nothing very serious has happened."

The Swatter pored over the list a few moments, and then said:

"You had better get rid of the men in this right hand list, or those who wanted to steal the silver. I'll go and bring off two or three of my men in a little sloop I have at my disposal, and will then take away these reprobates with me. Shall I go ahead in my own fashion?"

"If you will be so kind, Mr. Blair."

"Then I will act at once, sir."

Inclining himself politely to the couple, he hurried from the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SWATTER AND TOM GORKLE.

As Dan the Swatter reached the deck of the silver-laden schooner, he found Tom Gorkle awaiting him, with an anxious countenance.

"I want to see my brother, Mr. Blair," said the mate in a low tone. "Can the thing be managed?"

"Of course it can," replied the bogus detective, stepping to the taffrail. "Jump into this boat and take me ashore. We can talk of your brother and other matters by the way."

The mate spoke to a subordinate, leaving orders to cover his absence, and then complied with the visitor's wishes.

The boat was soon clear of the schooner, with Gorkle at the oars and Dan in the stern facing him.

"I will steer," resumed the Swatter, picking up an oar and trailing it behind him. "You need not row so fast. It's enough to just keep the oars moving gently."

He waited until a glance assured him that he was out of ear-shot of the colonel and his crew, and then continued:

"It's about time for your brother to be back from Old Mosher's where he has gone to sell his silver. He left his sloop in the usual place, near the Water Works, and I've requested him to wait there till he sees me. I shall return to him in due course, or send for him, and he'll meet you in an hour or two at the schooner. I depend upon you both to help me in a certain thing I'm doing. And now to more pressing matters."

He looked around keenly, assuring himself that none of the few boats on the surface of the harbor were within hailing, and then proceeded:

"It seems from what the colonel has just told me that two attempts have been made to cast away the schooner since you left Silver Island?"

The mate admitted the fact in silence, manifesting great uneasiness.

"Where was this, Tom?"

"At Caribou Island, in Lake Superior, and at Beaver Island, in Lake Michigan."

"Was there any talk of harming the colonel and his family?"

"It wasn't believed that any violence would be necessary, except to restrain the colonel and his son of their liberty."

"I didn't see this son on the schooner, Tom. Where is he?"

"He's gone ashore on an errand, sir, and I heard something said about his going to the theater this evening."

"So that he won't be back till late, in all probability?"

"No, sir."

The Swatter looked gratified.

"Not quite so fast, Tom," he said, changing his course a few points. "Who went ashore with young Southman?"

"The girl we picked up this morning."

"Ah, indeed? What's her name?"

"Miss Gilford."

"Miss Gilford?" echoed the Swatter. "Not Miss Alphonse Gilford, of Muskegon?"

"Yes, sir. That's the very young woman in question."

The Swatter looked intensely surprised and interested, continuing:

"But how was she 'picked up,' Tom?"

"Her sharpie had been wrecked in an encounter with a raft of logs, such as occasionally is lost in towing, or by breaking away from the boom of some mill in a storm."

"Strange!" commented Dan. "Was the girl alone?"

"When we found her—yes; but not when the sharpie struck the raft. Her brother had been with her, it seems, and they had quarreled about something, but I can give you no particulars. All I know is the little I could pick up while attending to my duties as mate."

"A very strange affair," said the Swatter, with a sigh. "I wish you knew more about it. And so Miss Alphonse has gone ashore with young Southman?"

The mate assented.

"But isn't that very singular, too?"

"No, sir, for the reason that the young people have long been acquainted, and are engaged to be married."

"Impossible!"

"It's perfectly true, sir," assured Tom Gorkle. "You should have seen them billing and cooing all the way up the lake! From what I hear, they are to be married to-morrow."

"Astounding!"

The Swatter was silent a moment, as if absorbed in some question growing out of this information.

Then he aroused himself, again giving his attention to Gorkle.

"I see you are put down, Tom, as one of those faithful to the colonel," he continued, "but I'm certain that such cannot be the case. I believe you to be leader of the whole conspiracy. Will you tell me candidly if I am right?"

The mate hesitated a few moments about replying, and Dan again changed his course considerably to avoid reaching the shore too soon.

"What will happen, Mr. Blair," the mate then demanded, "if I tell the exact truth?"

"Just what has happened to your brother for making a full confession to me about stealing the silver. I not only forgave him, but have taken him into my service."

"Then I'll not be punished?"

"Certainly not. You'll simply be promoted to the command of the schooner."

"To take a voyage in her, do you mean?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I will be candid, Mr. Blair. I am indeed the author of the plot for stealing the schooner and the silver. I've egged the men on in this direction while pretending to Colonel Southman to be faithful to him."

"I comprehended as much, Tom," said the Swatter, now heading his boat shoreward, "and I'm very glad that such is the case, as it brings you and me into line for acting together."

Gorkle looked pleased—and yet astonished.

"Let me now give you a hint of the real situation of affairs," continued Dan, and tell you who I really am. I'm not Bolly Blair, but Dan the Swatter!"

"Surely—you don't mean it," gasped the mate, suspending his oars in breathless excitement a few moments.

"I'm just what I tell you," assured Dan, with an insinuating smile, "and the plot I'm now engineering is to run away with the schooner and all the silver on it!"

The mate realized the identity of the man he was dealing with, and looked even more pleased than startled at this bold avowal.

"And of course I shall depend upon your assistance, Tom, and that of your brother," pursued the Swatter. "But tell me how you intended to dispose of the silver, when you had cast away the schooner?"

"I intended to drop the bars into ten or twelve feet of water, at some point known only to myself and my friends, sir," replied the mate, "and fish them up at my leisure at some future time."

"A good idea, sure enough," commented the Swatter thoughtfully. "I'll bear it in mind in case we have trouble in getting out of the lakes."

"Out of the lakes, sir? To do that, you'd have to steal the colonel as well as his silver, and so prevent all hue and cry behind you."

"That's my intention, Tom, and here's the first thing I want you to do to assist me. When you get back to the schooner, you must call around all you the men who were in the plot with you, and tell them you've seen Dan the Swatter."

"It shall be done, sir."

"You'll tell them that we're going to seize the vessel and the bullion, and that every man of them can secure an immense fortune—all the money he can ever use, in fact—by coming to our assistance."

"I'll make 'em simply wild, sir!"

"You'll say that you are going to be the captain, and that we are all going off on a sort of holiday excursion down the lakes, and may even spend several years together in taking a trip around the world."

Tom Gorkle nodded understandingly, his eyes gleaming with the intense greed these prospects awakened.

"You'll say that every man who joins us will have a twentieth of the half million," pursued Dan, "and they can all figure out for themselves what that will amount to."

"I'll tell 'em, sir."

"In a word, Tom," finished the Swatter, "you'll wake them all up in regard to this scheme, so that they will be ready to obey our orders when I return to the schooner, which I shall do as soon as I've attended to certain necessary measures. Don't forget that the colonel believes me to be the real Bolly Blair, and govern yourself accordingly."

"But may not the real Bolly Blair turn up suddenly?" suggested the mate.

"No, Tom. The colonel thought of sending for him, but decided not to do so. I believe you comprehend just what I want of you?"

"I do, sir."

"Then wheel on your left oar, so that I can leave you," ordered Dan, the boat having now neared the beach, "and row back to the schooner and wait for me."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SWATTER'S SCHEME DEVELOPING.

THE next step of the bogus detective was to walk along the beach to the spot where he had left his pal, Bart Wyser.

This rendezvous was on the Lake Park Front, nearly abreast of the old Exposition Building, but at that hour of the day the vicinity was by no means crowded.

"What luck, Dan?" inquired Wyser, in a guarded tone.

"The best in the world, Bart," answered the Swatter, throwing himself upon the sward, and motioning his pal to a place beside him.

"Then you saw Colonel Southman?"

"Yes, and humbugged him completely. He thinks I'm the great On-the-Wing himself—the real Bolly Blair—and wants me to put three or four of my best men on the schooner immediately to protect his silver from the crooks who are after it."

"Then the bullion is really there?"

"Yes, fifteen tons of it, in bars, of the value of half a million."

"Tell me all you've said and done since you left me."

She Swatter proceeded to do so, but the narrative was often broken by the laughter or jubilation of the plotters, as they rejoiced together.

"And you are going to become the guardian of this treasure?" inquired Wyser, when his pal had finished.

"Till to-morrow, as it is rather late in the day to act now, the colonel having made no arrangement with any bank to receive it."

"And am I to be one of the men, Dan, who will help you guard it?"

"Very naturally."

"And who are to be the others?"

"That's a question we ought to be careful about deciding," answered Dan. "Part of the crew are with the colonel, and they will have to be seized and reduced to helplessness before we can take possession."

"But the other half of the crew will assist you?"

"Without a doubt."

"Then you really see your way to the capture of the schooner and the treasure?"

"I do, Bart," assured Dan, his eyes gleaming greedily, "and I also see my way to the possession of that English baronet's millions!"

"Impossible, Dan!"

"It's just as I tell you," avowed the Swatter, firmly. "These two things can be worked together. The next step to be taken is to smuggle ourselves aboard as On-the-Wings. Two or three of us will do on a pinch—let's say three in addition to myself."

"But what three shall they be?" asked Wyser, thoughtfully. "If Sam Furbish were only here, he'd do for one of the number, but Lill Rookstool is too uncertain and dangerous to be taken into a game of this importance. The same may be said of the whole crowd we used to run with, but who have now dropped out of sight behind us. You wouldn't dare trust Tony Piffen?"

"Dear me! no more'n I'd trust a rattlesnake," answered the Swatter. "In fact, I've passed in review all the helpers, old and new, who graduated when we did, and there's not one of them worth a nickel. Billy Cryer would do, if he were not in prison, and the same may be said of one or two others."

"Then what's to be done?"

"I'll tell you, Bart. Do you remember the nice trip we enjoyed along the east shore of the lake a year ago, when we were wanted so badly for the Wentworth avenue burglary?"

Wyser assented.

"Then of course you remember the two weeks of rest and hiding we enjoyed at a farm-house near Muskegon?"

"At Derby Gilford's, you mean?"

"Yes, at Derby Gilford's. You'll remember that we arrived there in such a plight that we had to take the old man into our confidence—hatless, shoeless, hungry, devoured by mosquitoes, sick, lame, and out of money."

"Don't mention it," protested Wyser. "That was one of the worst situations we were ever in."

"Very well, Bart. The old man couldn't have treated us better if he had been a 'long-lost brother'!"

"I remember all that," avowed Wyser, "and I hope you also remember the daughter, a girl named Alphie. She returned from a visit the day we left, and I was so smitten with her that I've often tried to find time to run down there to see her. The only thing that kept me away was the fact that she's totally unlike her father and brother."

"How unlike them?"

"Why, they belong to one breed, Dan, and are capable of any crookedness," replied Wyser, "while she's a born angel, if there ever was one, and it was this fact that discouraged me from any attempt to win her."

"You did well to keep away, Bart, no doubt," commented the Swatter, "but I've had no such hesitation about renewing acquaintance with the father and son. When Hi Jenkins wrote me about the proposed visit of Sir Charles Depworth, and suggested that he could be plucked by our united efforts, I felt the need—oh, so

keenly!—of a new pal or two, who should be unknown to the police, and even be strangers in Chicago; who should be men of capacity and standing; who should have something to lose, and be capable of good work in a scheme of this gorgeous nature; in a word, who should just fill the bill for such a job as we now have on hand!"

"And you wrote to the Gilfords?" returned Wyser, in pleased surprise.

"I did, old fellow!" avowed Dan. "Recalling the good time we had at their farm-house, and realizing what a fine place we can have there for hiding ourselves when we've seized the baronet's millions, or are holding a millionaire or two for ransom, I wrote the old man full particulars of the Depworth affair, and requested him to come to Chicago as soon as possible to confer with me on the subject."

"Will he come, do you think?"

"Of course he will, and doubtless the son will come with him."

He glanced at an elegant gold watch he carried, and added:

"They should be at Black Jack Yattaw's at this very moment."

"But why at Black Jack's?"

"Because I didn't want them to come to my house," explained the Swatter. "As you're aware, Bart, I haven't had much faith in the nerve of that sister of mine for several months past, and have said very little to her about my projects. The manner in which she allowed that unknown detective to do us out of that handbag is a proof that we must be very prudent in our dealings with her from this time onward."

"I agree with you, Dan," returned Wyser.

"But can you find the necessary quiet and retirement at Black Jack's to come to a good understanding with Derby Gilford and his son?"

"Yes, or I can take them elsewhere," replied the Swatter. "If already here, as they ought to be, they can come aboard the schooner with you as On-the-Wings, thus making the required number."

"Then you are now going to Black Jack's to look for them?"

"Yes, Bart."

The Swatter reflected a few moments, asking himself if he should tell his pal what Tom Gorkle had told him about Alphie and the wrecked sharpie, and then he continued:

"It's possible, Bart, that there may be some sort of a hitch in the expected arrival of the Gilfords. But the girl's here already."

"Not Alphie?"

"Yes, Alphie. She came with the Southmans."

"But how with the Southmans?"

"They took her from the wreck of her sharpie this morning," explained Dan. "Just where she was going, and who she was going with, remains to be seen, but mention is made of the presence of her brother, so that the whole thing is something of a mystery."

"But the girl's here, you say? You didn't see her on the schooner?"

"No, she has gone ashore with young Southman, who has known her a long time, and to whom she is engaged to be married."

"You don't mean it?" cried Wyser, with an air of consternation.

"I'm telling you what Tom Gorkle told me, and will go at once to Yattaw's to see if the Gilfords are there. In the mean time, I want you to go and find Simon Gorkle. He must have returned from Old Mosher's by this time, with the proceeds of his latest batch of stolen silver, and you'll find him aboard the sloop in which he came up the lake from Waukegan."

"And what am I to do with him when I've found him?"

"Merely tell him that I've seen his brother, and assist him in bringing the sloop alongside of Black Jack's bumboat, where I shall be waiting for you."

"And is this all?" asked Wyser, as the couple gained their feet.

"All, till I see you at Black Jack's," replied the Swatter, and with this they separated, to avoid attracting attention, although their routes led for some time in nearly the same direction.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN IMPORTANT POINT SETTLED.

HIS preparations for the night having been completed to his liking, Black Jack Yattaw lighted his pipe and began sauntering to and fro on his favorite post of observation, with the air of being, like Selkirk on Juan Fernandez, the monarch of all he surveyed.

"It's mighty singular who that gal can be," he at length ejaculated. "Why is it that the Gilfords would sooner have their heads pulled off than tell me who were her parents?"

"It's because they're going to make a big pile out of the girl's father, when young Gilford has become her husband," answered Mrs. Yattaw, who had quietly sought her puzzled mate to tell him that his supper awaited him.

"You're right, mother," declared the bumboat, slapping his thigh emphatically. "But what is the great scheme that Dan the Swatter is going to carry out against Sir Charles Depworth, with the aid of the Gilfords?"

"Why, this can be nothing more or less than

the scooping of all those millions the baronet has brought to America," suggested Mrs. Yattaw. "Possibly there may be some connection between the two schemes—that of marrying the girl to young Gilford, and robbing Sir Charles—but if so it remains to be discovered."

The dark face of Black Jack corrugated like a sea in a storm, and his eyes gleamed with angry vividness.

"There'll be a lively gale at this end of the lake before the day's ended, mother," he muttered. "If I don't pump the soul of these little 'spirators, as dry as a hornets' nest, and teach 'em a lesson that'll last 'em till Adam and Eve come back to start a new tribe, you may have me shut up in the Zoo as a Wild Man o' Borneo! The idea of such crooks as Dan the Swatter and the Gilfords making their appointments here, just as if they owned me and the Government pier, with the whole of Lake Michigan thrown in, is enough to turn one's stomach! Blast them! They'll find that I've not lived thirty years in Scawgo to be chewed by such cattle!"

"Of course you'll fix 'em," suggested Mrs. Yattaw, in a voice of respect and confidence that was infinitely placative. "But won't you come to supper now, Jack, so as to be ready for the expected visit of Dan the Swatter, as announced in his letter to the old man Gilford?"

"I couldn't eat a thing, mother, till some of these questions are settled. Isn't it possible that the young man we saw on the deck of the schooner with Miss Alphie, and who can be no other than the colonel's son—isn't it possible, I say, that he will bring her to the dance this evening, out of curiosity?"

"Hardly, Jack," replied Mrs. Yattaw. "If he takes her ashore, as is likely, he'll doubtless take her to a theater."

"Then I must contrive to make her acquaintance in some other fashion," declared Black Jack. "I want to know who are her parents. Do you s'pose she was stolen from her home when she was little?"

"That's probable."

"Then may she not be English born, and may she not have been stolen from Sir Charles and Lady Depworth?" demanded Black Jack, with the air of being willing to hazard almost any conjecture for the sake of reaching a solution of the great problems crowding upon him.

"That may be," returned Mrs. Yattaw, "and I must say that the questions and answers of the father and son all point to some such distinguished parentage. Have you seen the evening papers?"

"Not yet, mother. I am too excited."

"Well, I've just glanced them over, as usual, to see what they say about you, and I notice that Sir Charles has arrived and gone to the Palmer. There's a column about his syndicate, with what he's doing, and what he isn't going to do, denying various rumors, and all that sort of thing, but there's a statement in one of the papers which may bear upon what we're talking about."

"Quick, mother! What is it?"

"Why, in speaking of Sir Charles and Lady Depworth," explained Mrs. Yattaw, "the paper says they have no family, and then goes on to say that their only daughter and heiress was taken from them many years ago in a strange and unaccountable manner."

"It says that, mother?"

"In so many words, Jack—just as I've given them to you!"

"Bring me that paper, and show me where those words are!"

Mrs. Yattaw hastened to comply.

"Sure enough!" was Jack's comment, after a long stare. "And now to act!"

He surveyed his wife up and down a moment, assuring himself that she was presentable, and then hurriedly thrust his hand into his pocket, bringing out a handful of money.

"Here, take this," he requested, "and go to the Palmer as fast as you can. Jump into the first carriage you encounter, and pay extra for fast driving. See Lady Depworth in person, and ask her two questions."

"Yes, Jack."

"The first is: 'Did you ever have a daughter stolen from you?' And the second is: 'What was her name?' If either of these questions are answered, you'll tell her ladyship that you have reasons for asking them, and that you'll see her again. You can also leave your name and address."

"And what then, Jack?"

"Then you come back here just as fast as horseflesh can bring you! I shall be right here every minute, except that I am going to give the Gilfords a dose of the antidote, and so get them in the way of coming to their senses, if they should be wanted. Go, mother."

The deep excitement which had crept into his face, blanching it, was reflected in that of Mrs. Yattaw, as she turned away in silence and vanished.

It did not take Black Jack long to visit both of his guests, or prisoners—whatever we may call the Gilfords—who were still under the sleeping potions he had so boldly given them.

Administering to each an antidote to the drug they had taken, he sauntered back to his post of observation, where he began to pace to and fro

again, with an uneasiness comparable to that of some wild animal in its cage.

The minutes lengthened to hours, the hours to days, and the days to years, while Black Jack thus walked and waited, and he had taken his head between his two hands, with some sort of fear that it would explode with all his anxiety and impatience, when he saw his wife returning.

Never before had he seen her so white—so ghost-like!

She reeled as if intoxicated as she staggered across the gangway.

"Oh, Jack!" she gasped, tottering into his arms, as he hastened to meet her.

"Well, mother?"

"I've seen Lady Depworth—"

She panted excitedly.

"And her only daughter was really stolen from her, all these years ago, when she was on her first visit to Chicago, by a man named Dawling Caddle!"

"Yes, mother!"

"And the name of the stolen daughter was Alphie!"

And with a wild scream of excitement which seemed like the exhalation of her soul, Mrs. Yattaw fainted dead away in the arms of her husband.

"Ha, ha! Glorious!" laughed Black Jack, as he eased the insensible form of his better half to the floor and pirouetted around it. "The devil take the whole batch of long-eared and knock-kneed schemers! We've got 'em!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

CURIOUS GATHERING AT THE BUMBOAT.

THANKS to the kindly and capable treatment her husband gave her, Mrs. Yattaw was soon herself again, and proceeded to give him the details of her visit to Lady Depworth.

"I never saw such a nice lady," she concluded. "She treated me just as if I had been a sister."

"You are sure the name of the lost daughter is Alphie?"

"Oh, yes; and her ladyship explained how her daughter happens to bear it. She was named in honor of her grandmother on her mother's side and the name has been in the family hundreds of years."

"It is certainly a very odd name," commented the bumboat, "and I've never known of its being possessed by any one else. Isn't it almost certain that Miss Alphie is the missing heiress of the baronet?"

"About that, Jack," returned Mrs. Yattaw emphatically, "there can be no doubt whatever."

"Then it seems that we've got the inside track on this very important matter?"

"We certainly have, Jack."

"And isn't it clear that we can turn an honest penny by getting hold of the gal and restoring her to her parents?"

"I was about to suggest that very proceeding."

"Of course we don't want to work with such crooks as the Swatter and the Gilfords against the baronet?"

"Never."

"But we do want to pump both the Swatter and the Gilfords, and get onto their little racket as much as possible?"

"To be sure, Jack."

"But who can be Dawling Caddle, the man who carried off Miss Alphie in her infancy? The name is sufficiently singular to be that of a Gypsy, and you'll remember that Derby Gilford said the child was left at his house by a gang of those people."

Mrs. Yattaw shook her head.

"A more likely supposition is that Dawling Caddle is another name for Derby Gilford himself!" she declared earnestly.

"That is indeed possible, and even probable," muttered the bumboat. "In any and every case, it's a theory we'll go upon until we learn to the contrary. Did her ladyship describe Dawling Caddle?"

"She did, and you'll see that her description applies to Derby Gilford."

She gave the particulars, and Black Jack nodded an excited assent to her suggestion.

"Not a word more now," he enjoined. "Get your supper and be ready to assist me, if wanted."

Mrs. Yattaw having vanished, Black Jack resumed his walk to and fro, but it was not long before his attentive gaze rested upon a well-known figure that was coming along the Government pier toward him.

The new-comer was Dan the Swatter.

"I want a drink, Mr. Yattaw," said Dan, on meeting the bumboat in his cabin—"one of those coolers you know so well how to make for a man who is both hot and thirsty."

With a dignified nod of assent, Black Jack proceeded to mix the desired beverage.

Without even hinting that his strange craft was closed to anybody, the redoubtable captain had a freezingly polite manner for crooks of a dangerous character, and he did not fail to now exhibit it.

"I also want to know if there is a gentleman stopping here who said that I might in-

quire for him," pursued Dan, helping himself to a chair.

"Yes, there's such a man here," replied the bumboat. "You refer to—"

"A gentleman named Derby Gilford, from Muskegon."

"Yes, Mr. Gilford is here," responded Black Jack, placing within Dan's reach the beverage prepared for him and pocketing its price. "But he spoke of having been awake all night, and of being very tired and sleepy and I believe he's now having a quiet snooze in one of my bunks."

"Then you can call him."

Black Jack shook his head, with a frown of wonder at Dan's audacity.

"I'd hardly like to take that liberty," he declared, "unless you can make it plain to me that the interview is just as important to him as to you. What do you want of him?"

"None of your business."

Instead of showing any anger against his guest for this declaration, Black Jack came out from behind his bar and sat down beside him, with the air of being perfectly content with himself and all his surroundings.

"It might not be any of my business," he said suavely, "if Sir Charles hadn't just left me, after joining me in a glass of my very best port."

"What Sir Charles?" growled the Swatter.

"Why, Sir Charles Depworth, the English baronet, who was my school-mate for five years, and who has just been here to see me."

The Swatter stared at him as if taking leave of his senses.

"Tell me—what do you mean, Captain Yattaw?" he demanded, with a sudden and extraordinary increase of respect for his host.

"I mean that I'm onto your scheme to rob my friend, Sir Charles Depworth, with the aid of Derby Gilford!"

The manner of the Swatter underwent a further modification.

"Who has said anything about robbery?" he demanded, hardly knowing whether to bluster or surrender at discretion.

"You did, in the letter you wrote to Derby Gilford day before yesterday."

The blow was a hard one, and Dan made no further attempt to assume the airs of a master.

"Does Sir Charles know that I've written to Gilford?" he asked.

"Not yet," replied Black Jack, "but he will know it, in about twenty minutes, unless you can see your way to being a little more civil!"

The Swatter reflected so rapidly that it didn't take him the sixteenth part of a second to realize that he had no occasion to quarrel with the bumboat.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Yattaw," he offered. "I've no idea what will be the outcome of my propositions to Derby Gilford, and can't have any, of course, until I've had a good talk with him. But I'll make you an equal partner with myself in anything that may grow out of this project if you will bring me face to face with Mr. Gilford without further delay."

"Now you begin to talk a very proper language," commented the bumboat, with a serene air, "but I must sound you a little before I can make any definite answer. You have to me, sir, all the earmarks of a back number. Do you know the gal personally?"

"What girl?"

"Alphie Gilford, or the girl known in Muskegon as such."

"I've merely seen her," replied the Swatter, "but am not entitled to say that I am acquainted with her."

"Are you aware that there is a great mystery in her life," pursued Black Jack, with an air of importance, "and that she is in no wise related to the Gilfords?"

"Dear me!" returned the visitor, unable to conceal his intense interest, "this is the first word I've ever heard of any such history."

"It must be, then, that you are still ignorant of the old man's project of marrying Miss Alphie to his step-son?"

"Of course I am," admitted the Swatter, wondering more and more at the bumboat's information.

"Then you see that you are indeed a back number," commented Black Jack, with marked jubilation. "Let me give you a few further facts in the case. The young people left home yesterday morning in the old man's sharpie. They quarreled on their way up the lake over the attempt of Florian Gilford to switch off from brother to suitor, and the wrecking of the sharpie by a raft of logs it encountered left them both in a very precarious situation, with the details of which I need not detain you. Suffice it to say that he has made his way to town safely in a row-boat, and is now asleep in my bed."

"And the girl?" inquired the Swatter, thinking how much Bart Wyser would be interested in these particulars.

"Oh, she was picked up by Colonel Archy Southman, who has come up the lake to see Sir Charles, and I suppose she's now the guest of the colonel and his wife aboard of their schooner."

This confirmed what Tom Gorkle had told the Swatter, but it none the less gave the latter a new idea of the resources of the bumboat.

"You literally take my breath away, Mr.

Yattaw," he declared. "How can these things have come to your knowledge?"

"None of your business!" answered Black Jack, smiling.

The Swatter turned all sorts of colors at finding his insolence of a few minutes before thus returned to him.

"I see that I owe you an apology, Mr. Yattaw," he said, "and I hasten to tender it. I'm ashamed of my testiness of a few minutes ago, and beg your pardon!"

"I grant it of course."

"Then let's have a drink of that famous old port you were talking about," proposed the Swatter, "as a pledge that we shall ever be the best of friends."

"With pleasure," returned the bumboat, handing down a bottle from one of the highest shelves behind the bar.

He had filled a couple of wine glasses, when a quiet step resounded on his hearing, and he turned his head to encounter the gaze of Derby Gilford, who was in the act of emerging from the seclusion to which he had been consigned an hour or two earlier.

"One moment, gentlemen," said Gilford, with a special salutation to the Swatter. "I'll take a drink with you, if you have no objections."

"Certainly," returned Dan.

"With the greatest of pleasure, Mr. D. C.," very politely responded Black Jack Yattaw, with a nod of smiling welcome to the new-comer.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BLACK JACK READY FOR BUSINESS.

LEANING across the bar again, his fingers clutching it tightly, Derby Gilford stared at the imperturbable countenance of Black Jack as he would have stared at a phantom.

"What did you call me?" he demanded, in a voice husky with excitement.

"I called you 'Mr. D. C.,' as a little piece of pleasantry," replied the bumboat, in the suavest of tones. "Didn't you ever hear of a man who was popularly known by his initials?"

Derby Gilford changed his attitude a little, still staring into the face of the man of mystery before him, but he didn't cease to clutch the bar, and it wouldn't have been difficult to see that his knees were quite shaky.

His whole frame, in fact, seemed a prey to serious agitation.

"Then you mean to tell me—or insinuate," he faltered, in a low tone, "that my initials are D. C.?"

"Or were sixteen years ago, Mr. Gilford," answered Black Jack, his smile deepening.

The gesture with which the visitor received this declaration was very much like that he would have displayed at the view of a rattlesnake.

From far down in his throat some sort of an exclamation escaped him.

"Do those initials stand for anything in particular?" he ventured.

"Oh, yes—for the name of the man who has discarded them."

"And—and what was that name?" blurted out Gilford, desperately.

"It's unnecessary to mention it here, sir," replied Black Jack blandly. "It's enough that you and I know what it was. Let us turn to other matters."

"But I want to know—"

"We'll talk of it some other time, Mr. Gilford," said the bumboat. "Just now I must give my attention to your son. Perhaps he'd like to join us. At any rate, I'll give him the chance."

Excusing himself, he stepped into the snug retreat where he had left Florian Gilford, and in a few moments thereafter, his voice was heard in conversation with that personage.

"My son, sure enough," muttered Derby Gilford, after listening a moment. "That man beats the devil!"

"Who?" asked Dan, for the first time addressing a remark to his proposed ally.

"Why, Black Jack! Can it be that he has discovered—"

He interrupted himself, as if realizing that he was needlessly betraying secrets better left in his own keeping.

"Oh, yes—he knows everything," Dan was prompt to declare. "He has not only told me your history, and that of your step-son, but also that of your reputed daughter."

Ere another word could be exchanged, the bumboat made his appearance, followed by Florian Gilford.

"Ah, here you are?" greeted the father, smiling a welcome. "Mr. Yattaw has given me an inkling of your adventures since you left home. Is anything wrong about you, Florian?"

"Not particularly," answered the son, "except that Mr. Yattaw has taken all my money for safe-keeping, and has also given me some sort of a drug to put me to sleep."

"It was done with the kindest intentions, sir," assured the bumboat, seizing the bottle which had so long stood neglected. "The fact is, young man, you were talking to me in a style that wasn't more than one remove from insanity."

"In what way, Mr. Yattaw?"

"Why, you were saying that you couldn't or

wouldn't tell me who are the parents of Miss Alphie."

"Well, was that insanity?"

"It was certainly very great foolishness," declared Black Jack, with unequivocal vigor, "since I am as well posted on her history as I am on your father's."

"On father's?"

"Just so, young man," assured the bumboat quietly. "If you think I don't know your father's history, just ask him."

Florian turned his gaze upon his step-father, as was natural, but a single glance was enough.

"And now to drink to our better acquaintance, gentlemen," proposed Black Jack, handing down a couple of additional glasses and filling them.

The proposition was accepted and executed, but without any unnecessary delay.

"Have you any objections, gentlemen," then resumed the bumboat, "to taking me in as a partner in the business which now occupies your attention?"

"What business?" asked Florian.

"That which is mentioned in Dan's letter of recent date to your father."

"I don't understand 'you,'" declared Florian, fighting shy of the whole matter, and turning a wondering glance upon his father and the Swatter.

"I refer," exclaimed Black Jack, looking from one to another, "to the proposal Dan has made concerning the millions of Sir Charles Depworth."

"Ah, then you have read that letter?" cried Derby Gilford, clapping his hands to his pockets.

"Naturally enough, since Dan was so foolish as to write it."

The wrath with which the Swatter glared from one to the other can be imagined.

"And did you drug me, Jack?" pursued Derby Gilford.

"I did, sir."

"What for?"

"So that you wouldn't go away, as you threatened, and so miss seeing Dan."

The excuse was accepted.

"And had you no other motive?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"You didn't drug me to rob me?"

"Not at all, Mr. D. C. I simply took your money for safe-keeping, and here it is, and I may as well say the same to your son, and so be rid of the whole matter."

He handed out the two wads of greenbacks in question, and the father and son bestowed them anew on their persons, with long sighs of relief.

"I must say you know how to do the handsome thing, Mr. Yattaw, even if you are bold and abrupt in some of your methods," declared Derby Gilford. "I suppose you have been 'King of the Pier' so long that you don't care a copper for anybody?"

"No, nor for the 'copper,' either," assured the bumboat. "But sit down, gentlemen, and we'll proceed to business. We've gathered here to take measures to transfer the fortune of Sir Charles Depworth to our own pockets, and the grand question before the meeting is, how is this to be done?"

"Let Dan tell us," answered Florian Gilford.

Accepting the chair offered him, the Swatter sat down and scrutinized his companions, seeming ill at his ease.

To be candid, he had serious doubts of Black Jack, and was asking himself how the redoubtable captain had so suddenly turned up as the very center and turning point of the game he himself had proposed and of which he had supposed himself to be the principal actor.

"Did you call Mr. Yattaw into this affair, either of you?" asked the Swatter, his glances alternating between the father and son.

"Not I," said the old man.

"Nor I," declared Florian.

"Then why is he in it?" continued the Swatter impressively.

"Because some chance or accident has thrust him into it, I suppose," answered the father, after some hesitation.

"Or because he has thrust himself into it," amended Florian.

"In any case, I don't want him to come into it," pursued Dan, with an air as grim as his voice. "He's in no sense a crook, and in no wise a safe associate for us. He's audacious, picturesque, independent, and aggressive; he's anything he cares to be; he defies the city police and even the Federal Government; he's the 'King of the Pier' and the 'Pirate of the Lakes'; but he's not a man of our sort, Mr. Gilford, nor is he a man who can be utilized in such an affair as now claims our attention."

He arose excitedly, taking two or three steps toward the gangway.

"Then you don't care to talk in my presence?" demanded the bumboat, with latent lightning in his eyes.

"No, sir," replied Dan.

"Then you can do the other thing," returned Black Jack, "and commence by getting out of here as soon as you please. You may go too, Mr. Gilford, but I'll keep your card, and that of your son, for future reference."

Ere Dan could reply, his eye rested upon a

sloop that was coming alongside the bumboat—that in which Simon Gorkle had come up the lake from Waukegan with the stolen silver.

Simon and Bart Wyser were on it.

"Ah, just in time, Bart," muttered Dan, beckoning to the Giffords, and in another moment all three of them had transferred themselves from the bumboat to the sloop, without a single word of adieu to Black Jack, and were taking their departure.

"Good riddance!" muttered the latter, with an ominous frown. "But I'll bet a thousand dollars to a cent that you won't sail so far as you imagine you're going to."

"You'll come to supper now, won't you, Jack?" asked his wife, suddenly presenting herself again to him.

"Of course I will," he replied, hastening to follow her. "I'm now ready for business! I'll see Sir Charles and tell him these reprobates are after him. 'I'll visit every theater in Scawgo on a still hunt for that missing heiress and the young gentleman who's paying her attention. In a word, mother, I'll smoke those crooks out of their holes and get much cash and renown by so doing!'"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CROOKS IN POSSESSION.

As the sloop containing the conspirators thus floated away on the surface of the harbor, the Swatter turned to his associates almost angrily.

"What has that man been doing to you?" he demanded, looking back at Black Jack. "He certainly seems to have taken great liberties."

"And so he has," returned Florian Gilford, "but there has been a reason for it. 'I arrived here this morning in such a forlorn condition—without coat or vest, and so on—that he and his wife leaped to the conclusion that I had been in some terrible adventure. Not being able to find out from me what had happened, Black Jack gave me a dose that put me to sleep, his idea being to keep me here until the mystery attending my arrival had been cleared up.'"

"And he treated me in the same manner, and for much the same reasons," declared Derby Gilford. "His idea has evidently been to discover what we were doing in Chicago."

"Well, he has found out, it seems," commented the Swatter bitterly, "by reading while you were unconscious, the letter I wrote you. If it had occurred to me that any human being other than yourselves would ever read that letter, I never would have sent it. It fairly paralyzes me to think that the project I had in view is known to this man!"

"The case is not quite so bad as that, Dan," said Derby Gilford, in a deprecating voice. "All Black Jack can have learned from the letter is what I have learned from it, namely, that you propose in some way to get hold of a portion of the money the great English syndicate has sent to this country."

"That's true, curse him!" admitted the Swatter, still looking back at the bumboat. "And what can he do to harm us? Possibly he may go and warn Sir Charles that certain crooks are intending to rob him, but even that measure will not save the baronet from our clutches. The fact is, I've got things in such shape already that no man living can prevent me from getting hold of millions!"

An intense sigh of relief escaped the father and son.

"You don't know what comfort this assurance gives me, Dan," said the former. "I had begun to fear that our carelessness, or the boldness of Yattaw—or the two together—had made the whole project precarious. But give us the particulars."

"In a moment."

Arising and bending a swift glance around, the Swatter spoke to Simon Gorkle, who had been engaged in getting the sloop clear of the Government pier and the shipping beside it.

"No, you needn't get up the sail, Simon," he said. "Just let her drift away before the wind, which is in the right direction to take us to the spot where the colonel's schooner is lying."

Then he came back to the Giffords.

"About a mile from here, my friends," he resumed, "we shall find the schooner of Colonel Southman, which arrived about two hours ago."

"The 'Wizard' man, you mean?" interjected Florian Gilford.

"Exactly," returned Dan.

"We know all about him," continued Florian. "Even our Muskegon papers have talked of the proposed big deal."

"Well, here he is, and I've already had a long interview with him, presenting myself to him as Bolly Blair, who's the chief of the On-the-Wing Detectives. In this character I have offered to furnish him three or four reliable men to protect his silver till to-morrow, and you two, with my friend here, Bart Wyser, are the men I have selected for this business."

"But isn't it risky for us to figure as detectives?" asked Derby Gilford, with the readiness of a man whose life is full of apprehensions.

"I won't say that there is no risk," replied Dan, "for there's risk in everything—even in eating your dinner, or there wouldn't be so many men choked with their beef. But the game is worth the powder. The colonel," he

pursued, his eyes gleaming, "has brought along with him half a million in silver bullion, and this treasure may be regarded as ours at this moment."

The father and son expressed their delight, beginning to share the excitement of their leader.

"And this half million is merely the beginning of the pile this night is destined to bring to us," announced the Swatter. "We shall add to it a good share of the funds Sir Charles Depworth has brought from England. Just how this is to be done will appear later."

Returning to Simon Gorkle, he took the bearings of the sloop, and said:

"I have told Colonel Southman that you have been arrested, and that is a very good reason why you cannot present yourself to him in the character of a deliverer. Isn't there any place on the sloop where you can hide?"

"Certainly, sir. There's a little bit of a hold forward of the mast, and a hatchway by which to enter it. And once in this retreat, I can fasten the hatch from below and thus prevent any one from detecting my presence."

"Then please dispose of yourself in this fashion for an hour or two," requested the Swatter, "and by that time I shall be in complete possession of the schooner, when you shall have your proper place as one of its guardians. Bart has told you, I suppose, that your brother is to have command of the craft, and that we expect to take a long voyage in her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I've only to add that you shall be his mate, and that you shall have your share of every dollar that we can get away with between now and morning."

"Then I shall leave the sloop wholly to your care, sir?"

The Swatter assented, and Simon Gorkle hastened to vanish into the retreat of which he had spoken.

Taking possession of the sloop, and getting sail on her, the Swatter was soon alongside the schooner, Tom Gorkle hastening to meet him and whisper a few words of encouragement.

"Your brother is there, where he will remain till further advices," returned the Swatter, with a nod toward the spot where Simon was hidden. "No one has been here since I went away?"

"No, sir."

Colonel Southman came out of the cabin at this moment, followed by his wife, both of them looking pleased and relieved.

"You've brought your men, I see?" said the former glancing them over, with his usual genial manner. "And very glad I am to see them!"

"You've had no trouble, I hope, since I left you?"

"Oh, none, Mr. Blair, and I do not expect any, but it nevertheless gives my wife great comfort to feel that we are well guarded."

"Since I left you, colonel," remarked Dan, "I have changed my mind about taking away those men who have been conspiring to seize the silver."

"Why is that?"

"Because they might stir up a small army of scamps ashore to come here during the night and make an attack upon you."

"There is something in that, sure enough, Mr. Blair. Your present idea, then—"

"Is to leave them just where they are—in the forecabin—till we get ready to land the silver tomorrow."

"That's better, sure enough," decided Colonel Southman instantly. "I had not reflected that the scattering of several men ashore, with such tales as these men can tell, would fix upon us at least half a dozen eyes for every one that is now upon us."

"Thanks for your approval, colonel," said Dan. "And now, sir, with your permission, I'm going ashore to see that everything is safe at that end of the line. My men have already received their orders, in a general way, but you can supplement them at any moment in any way desired."

With a polite inclination, he returned to the sloop, exchanging a few words with Tom Gorkle, as the latter helped him push off, and the next instant, handling his craft with masterly skill, he was rapidly leaving the schooner behind him.

"You can sneak out, Simon," he at length called to his hidden ally.

The order was acted upon, Simon Gorkle soon joining him in the cockpit.

"I'll leave you waiting for me, Simon, near the Illinois Central shops," said the Swatter. "Everything being right yonder," and he nodded toward the schooner, "I'll see if there's any need of pipe-laying ashore, but I shall not be gone very long."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ON-THE-WINGS AT WORK.

In their room at the Palmer House sat the two On-the-Wing leaders, Captain Swopp in his own proper character, and Bolly Blair in the character of Nibbs the coachman.

"You got on well, then, as the driver of Hi Jenkins and Mrs. Rimmer?" the English chief was saying, in a guarded tone.

"Very finely indeed," avowed Bolly, "thanks to a special inspiration which came to me at the right moment."

"Of what nature?"

"The idea of passing myself off upon them as a crook."

"And you succeeded?"

"Perfectly."

"Bravo! That's a card I've played more than once myself," declared Swopp. "Did you invent a character, or take one ready made?"

"I took a real personage, name and all, Gordon."

"That's rarely possible. Give me the particulars."

"Well, I confided to them that 'Nibbs the coachman' is an assumed name," explained Blair, "and informed them that I am really Sam Furbish, a rather noted crook, who was sent up for two years, not long ago, for bigamy."

"And they accepted you as Furbish?"

"Without hesitation," pursued Blair. "As fate would have it, they had heard of Furbish, bigamy, two years, and all, through some rogue who had fled to London from Chicago, and the daughter smiled almost tenderly at finding so good a man in such a bad situation. I told them I was out on a pardon, and they've hired me to devote myself and my carriage especially to them."

"Excellent!" commented Swopp. "They haven't told you yet who they really are, I suppose, nor avowed the nature of their business in America?"

"Not yet," admitted Blair, "but they'll doubtless get more and more confidential as we get better acquainted. The father has already entrusted me with a letter to Dan the Swatter, and I've undertaken to arrange for an interview between them at nine o'clock this evening at Black Jack Yattaw's."

"But, can you do it?"

"I could, but I won't," returned Bolly decidedly. "I've no interest at all in bringing two such reprobates together, but every sort of reason for keeping them separated."

"But the letter?"

"Oh, I can lose it, or pretend that Dan can't be found, and so give it back to them, or I can make some suggestion that will replace it."

"Dan, it seems, has the first innings, he having got away with that bag, but don't you regard Hi and his daughter as even more dangerous than Dan?"

"Of course I do, and they would be still more so if we were to leave them here, the more especially as they have already placed themselves on visiting terms with the baronet."

"Then you propose to clear them out of this hotel?"

"Immediately, captain," answered the chief of the On-the-Wings. "It wouldn't do for me to leave them here longer. Some of my reportorial friends have already intimated to me that 'Baron Bigland' and 'Lady Chidder' are two of the queerest specimens of British nobility they have ever encountered."

"And no wonder! If the couple were a little wiser, they would have hesitated about masquerading about in this fashion."

"The more especially," supplemented Bolly Blair, "as we have 'Burke's Peerage' and the 'Upper Ten Thousand' in almost every hotel and newspaper office."

He reflected a moment, listening to the voices and movements of Hi Jenkins and his daughter in the adjoining apartment, and then resumed:

"Not only must we get the pair out of the house, but we must inform Sir Charles and Lady Depworth of their real character, and so prevent them from scoring any further success in that direction. We must also let Sir Charles know what sort of a hold Sally has secured upon the private secretary. Don't you think all these measures are incumbent upon us?"

"Of course I do."

"To reveal what we have discovered, at this early stage of affairs," pursued Bolly Blair, "may not be to our financial advantage, and we may even cut ourselves out of a good job by this very measure, but I have never allowed self-interest to stand a moment in the way of duty, and I never will."

"It is needless to say that I am in perfect accord with you, Bolly," said the Englishman, with hearty emphasis. "Shall I remain on the watch here while you visit our neighbors?"

"I wish you would, Gordon," returned Blair. "By doing so, you'll be at hand in case Sir Charles or Lady Depworth should require further protection."

"They've put all that paper into money, and the money has been banked, I believe, so that only the check of Sir Charles can now touch it."

"That's the exact situation."

"And that secretary has now gone out to make his first acquaintance with the city?"

"Exactly, Gordon. Speaking of Bullinger, I wish you would watch for his return."

"And if I encounter him?"

"I want you to tell him who 'Baron Bigland' and 'Lady Chidder' really are, and advise him to send no more loans after the one he made to Sally this morning. The poor devil may be

too infatuated with his adventuress to thank us for our information, but we can do no less than post him in regard to his footing, for fear that he may go swiftly down to destruction."

"I'll endeavor to see him, Bolly, as soon as he comes back. In the mean time, what will you do with Hi Jenkins and his daughter?"

"I'll locate them in a house I have just vacated—one of my own—where I shall have them under my eye, with or without figuring as their coachman, just as long as they may remain in Chicago."

"Do you mean that you can look in upon them at any time without their knowledge?"

"Well that's a rather strong way of putting it, Gordon, but I have duplicate keys, and, even a secret entrance which they are not likely to discover—a little trick of the trade, you know—and I've an idea of delivering the letter to the Swatter, and making Hi's new abode a general rendezvous of the crooks, so that I can get them all into my web at once. Of this, however, when I return."

He took a preliminary glance from the door as he ceased speaking and then glided from the apartment.

CHAPTER XXX.

GIVING THEM THEIR PEDIGREE.

BOTHERED by several reporters, who wanted to interview him with that distinguished consideration which is accorded the British nobleman in the United States, the bogus Baron Bigland at length retired to his bedroom, which gave on an open court, and seated himself in his shirt-sleeves by a window, with the intention of enjoying his briarwood pipe in all its unsocial self-sufficiency.

He had done ample justice to his first dinner at the Palmer, (which was destined to be also his last,) and was in that contented mood which comes from an excellent digestion, or which gives rise to it—the best of doctors disagree—but the attentions of his visitors had made him tired and nervous, not to say anxious.

"This intrusion of interviewers is an annoyance we had not fully foreseen, Sally," he remarked. "I had no idea 'his ludship' would prove such a drawing card, or I should have been tempted to conceal myself among those 'colonels' and 'generals' who are always coming and going in hotels of this description."

"It's one of the penalties we have to pay for being such distinguished Britons," returned Mrs. Rimmer, with a sarcastic smile, "and I'm not sure that I wholly dislike it. It's really amusing to see what charms these little worshipers can find in 'Lady Chidder,' when plain Sally Rimmer wouldn't secure a second glance from them."

A knock succeeded.

"There's another of them," muttered the bogus baron. "Let's pretend we're asleep, or dead—anything except visible."

The knock was repeated, but the crook and his daughter sat as motionless as a couple of statues.

"It's only me," at length came a voice through the keyhole.

"It's Nibbs," exclaimed Sally, bounding toward the door. "We must of course admit him."

The suggestion was acted upon, and the pretended coachman made his appearance, inclining himself to his employers politely, but having an air of gloom and disappointment which at once fixed their attention.

"You have come to see if we're going out driving, I suppose?" questioned Sally.

"Not exactly, ma'am," answered Nibbs.

"Then what is it, man?" asked Jenkins.

"I've brought you very bad news, baron," responded Nibbs. "You know Sir Charles Depworth, who is lodged near you?"

The couple bowed in concert.

"You are aware, I presume, of the nature of the business which has brought the baronet to America?"

"Yes, to invest a large amount of British money," replied Hi Jenkins. "I intend to take an interest of a million or two in his syndicate myself. What of him?"

"Well, baron, Dan the Swatter and his particular pal, Bart Wyser, have seized the great syndicate's money, which the baronet had in a hand-bag, and have made their escape."

The crook uttered a suppressed yell of consternation, while his daughter sat as if paralyzed.

"I feel this blow badly, sir," pursued the On-the-Wing, with well-acted vexation, "because I've been scheming to get hold of that money myself, with the aid of a friend, and thus qualify myself to live an honest and peaceful life hereafter."

"Curse them!" growled the crook, his face blanching. "How was it done?"

Blair briefly explained.

"And to think that they should thus slip in ahead of me, when it was I who sent them the baronet's photo and all the details about him—"

"Hush, father!" broke in Sally, seizing his arm. "You're giving yourself away!"

"But I won't hush," declared the crook vehem-

mently. "Curse them! After I have taken the trouble to cross the ocean, too! They knew I was coming, and should have waited to advise with me. How dare they?"

He paused at this point, restrained by the pressure of Sally's hand on his arm, while the On-the-Wing looked significantly and knowingly from one to the other.

"I can tell you something that will make their conduct worry you less, sir," said Nibbs. "The money was recovered by a detective before Dan had time to take a look at it."

"How?" breathed Sally.

The On-the-Wing gave her the facts, but without saying anything that could point to his agency in the affair.

"Good! Glorious!" muttered Hi Jenkins, rubbing his hands together gleefully, the pallor leaving his face. "This will teach them better than to make any attempt to act without me! Another time!"

"Hush, father," again enjoined Sally in a whisper. "You forget the presence of Mr. Nibbs, as also the fact that every word you are saying gives you away!"

"I don't care, Sally, nor need you," retorted the crook. "Nibbs is one of us, and there's no occasion for us to be afraid of him—none whatever. To the contrary, we have every reason to take him into our counsels and interest him in the game we are playing."

He wiped his face vigorously, and concentrated upon the On-the-Wing a gaze little short of confidential, resuming:

"But tell us more, Nibbs. Has the robbery been made public?"

"Oh, that was inevitable."

"Then the baronet has been overrun by reporters, of course?"

"That was also inevitable. Some of them have also been here to interview you, I believe?"

"Yes, Nibbs, but I sent them away with very scanty information about either my plans or my ideas, I assure you."

"Very naturally," commented the pretended coachman, "and Sir Charles has been even more reticent than yourself. While admitting that certain valuable papers had indeed gone astray for an hour, he was able to declare that he hadn't lost a dollar, and that consequently he didn't care to say a word for publication on the subject."

"And isn't the Swatter to be arrested?" demanded Sally.

"No, ma'am."

The crook sighed softly as if he had reached a country where the manners and customs were just to his liking.

"But the matter must have drawn a crowd of detectives to the hotel," pursued the bogus baron. "Did you hear the name of the man who went to Dan's house and took the bag from him?"

"Oh, yes. He was Bolly Blair."

"Oh, indeed!"

The crook's air attested that he was keenly alive to the name.

Turning to Sally, he said:

"Bolly Blair is the American associate of that Captain Gordon Swopp of whom we have heard so much in London, but have never seen. They are the chiefs of those On-the-Wing Detectives, you know."

Sally's face brightened with due comprehension of the matter.

"Then perhaps they'll get onto us, father," she said laughingly.

The words were not intended for the hearing of Blair, but they nevertheless reached him.

"Such is indeed the case, ma'am," he said, inclining himself politely.

"In what way, Nibbs?" asked Hi Jenkins, suddenly manifesting an intense interest in the conversation.

"It's merely a whisper, sir, which has traversed the hotel, as coming from some mysterious detective."

"A whisper, Nibbs?" murmured Sally.

"A rumor or suspicion—whatever we may call it—which touches you both very closely," continued Blair.

"To what effect, man?" demanded the crook, looking startled.

"I'm bound to tell you, of course, sir, after the very handsome manner in which you have treated me," pursued Blair. "It is said that you are not Baron Bigland—not at all, sir—and the rumor is confirmed by a dispatch from the real Baron Bigland, who landed at Vancouver, British Columbia, yesterday morning!"

Gasping for breath, the impostor reeled in his chair at this announcement.

"Then who can I be?" he asked, with an attempt at a sneer.

"You are said to be a noted crook from London—no less a personage, in fact, than Hi Jenkins," answered the On-the-Wing—"if you will kindly excuse me for repeating what I hear said about you."

"And what do they say about me, Mr. Nibbs?" asked the daughter, flushing and paling by turns.

"They say that you are Mrs. Sally Jenkins Rimmer," replied Blair, "and that the real Lady Chidder is in England!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

REMOVING THEM TO NEW QUARTERS.

THE crook and his daughter stared at the supposed coachman a moment in silent consternation.

"And do these people pretend to say why we have come to America?" then asked Sally, the first to recover her voice.

"Oh, yes," replied Nibbs. "They say that you have followed Sir Charles Depworth here with a view to robbing him of at least a portion of his millions."

The crook made a despairing sort of gesture—one which announced as plainly as words could have done that he would make no attempt to deny the "rumor" which had thus reached him.

"It's those cursed On-the-Wings!" he exclaimed, wrathfully. "Satan take them! They're getting to be everywhere!"

"I only wish I could get hold of one of them!" ejaculated Sally, gesticulating wildly. "I'd scratch his eyes out!"

"I suppose, Nibbs," said Jenkins, with a ghastly attempt at a smile, "that the On-the-Wings have got onto us?"

"That's evident, sir."

"You think it will be in vain for us to do anything?"

"Oh, quite useless."

"And perfectly impossible for us to make any attempt to fight them?"

"I should say so!"

"In this case," said the crook, turning to Sally, "it's merely a question of time when we shall have some of the On-the-Wings here to interview us or ask us for credentials, or what not. Don't you think so, Nibbs?"

"I was about to suggest that some such measure is probable," replied the pretended coachman.

"Understand me, Nibbs," resumed the crook, bluntly. "I neither admit nor deny anything. But we are strangers in a strange land, and we realize how easily innocence itself is hunted to the death by reckless mendacity. Don't you think, Nibbs, it would be wise for us to beat a retreat before the storm that is evidently gathering around us? In other terms, hadn't we better get out of here?"

"That's my advice, sir," returned the On-the-Wing, with another inclination. "You will be unable to figure here as Baron Bigland to any further advantage."

"But where can we go, Mr. Nibbs?" demanded Sally.

"Into a house of your own, ma'am, or at least into private quarters."

"Can you help us in this matter, Nibbs?" inquired Jenkins.

"Much more than you would have dared to hope, sir," replied the On-the-Wing. "In fact, I have at my disposal the very place you want. It is a neat, semi-detached villa, in a fashionable neighborhood, and one of the prettiest residences in Chicago."

"I'm afraid it will be too expensive for us," suggested the crook.

"Not at all, sir. The rent is merely eighty dollars a month. Situated as you are, sir," added the On-the-Wing, significantly, "it's absolutely essential for you to have a house all to yourselves, where you can receive your friends without any one's being the wiser."

"But what excuse can we give for leaving the hotel so soon?" asked Jenkins.

"None is needed, sir," answered Blair. "Nothing is more common than for guests to leave even the very best hotels for private lodgings. Besides, I'll make everything right by telling the hotel people that you have been invited by a friend to make his house your home during your stay in Chicago."

"How good of you!" said Sally.

"Let me add another word in all frankness," continued the On-the-Wing. "All these great hotels have to be very particular about their guests. It's out of the question for you to remain here a moment longer, unless you wish to be arrested as frauds and dangerous characters."

"How awkward!" sighed Sally. "What's to be done, father?"

The crook ran his fingers through his hair with an air of desperation, a curse escaping him.

How differently things were going from what he had expected!

Only a few hours in Chicago, and yet his whole scheme a mere puff-ball, on which the On-the-Wings had placed their grasp!

"You needn't do or say anything," ventured Blair, his glances alternating from one to the other. "You can walk down to my carriage, which is where you found it before, and take your seats in it. I'll settle your bill, and see to getting down your baggage."

The crook and his daughter sighed in unison, with the keenest relief.

"Go ahead then," ordered the pretended baron. "We've nothing to do, Nibbs, except to follow your suggestions, and be thankful for them. Send up a porter for our luggage as soon as you please, and we'll join you at the carriage."

The On-the-Wing bowed understandingly, moving toward the door.

"By the way, Mr. Nibbs, what will be our new address?" asked Sally.

The detective wrote it on a card, which he handed to her, and then bowed himself out of the apartment.

"Of course I must leave a line for Bullinger," said Sally, opening her writing-desk, "and it shall be to the effect Nibbs suggested, namely that we have gone to the house of a friend."

"But how will he get it?" inquired her father. "I believe he is out."

"I can pass it under his door if he is absent."

This was done in due course, the secretary not being in his room, and the couple then proceeded to the carriage awaiting them, neither of them making the least allusion to a further call upon Sir Charles and Lady Depworth.

At the end of a pleasant drive which was not very lengthy, the On-the-Wing drew up at the villa he had promised them.

It was—as he had said—one he himself owned and had recently vacated in order to move into a beautiful cottage which stood in its own grounds, and which thus afforded him that absolute privacy he had begun to regard as the first necessity of his residence.

"Here we are," he announced.

The villa was handsomely furnished, and a single glance at it was enough to charm Hi Jenkins and his daughter.

"Is it not just the place you need?" asked Blair.

"The very thing," answered the father.

"Nothing could be better," declared Sally.

Leading the way up the steps, the detective gave himself admittance with a key, and showed the new tenants into the parlors, leaving them to congratulate each other on the elegance of the same while he deposited their baggage in the wide hall.

"Don't you think you will be pleased here?" he then inquired.

"Perfectly delighted," replied Sally. "Had we better pay a month's rent in advance?"

"That will be as well, ma'am," returned the On-the-Wing. "You can hand me the money, and I'll bring you a receipt from the agents."

The crook counted out eighty dollars, which the detective placed in his pocket, with a smile of double meaning.

Considering how many empty houses there were in Chicago, it was gratifying to have even a month's rent for the one he had vacated; and considering the daring and desperate character of Hi Jenkins and Sally, it was a very nice thing to have them where they could be found if wanted, and where he could visit them without their knowledge.

"You will, of course, require a cook and chambermaid," suggested the On-the-Wing. "Shall I send them to you?"

The couple consulted a moment in silence.

"We'll see about that later," then replied Jenkins—"perhaps to-morrow or next day. Is there a grocer near?"

"In the next block, sir, as also an excellent baker," replied Blair. "Do you wish to send me on an errand to any of these people?"

"Not at present, thank you."

The On-the-Wing comprehended.

The couple were so upset by the sudden change of status which had overtaken them that they had no more pressing wish than to discuss it, and for this reason were anxious to be alone.

"I presume you can let me have the balance of the afternoon to myself," pursued the On-the-Wing carelessly, "and thus give me a chance to drive out a party of rich gentlemen who will pay me handsomely?"

"Certainly," replied Sally.

"Then when shall I come again?"

"About nine this evening. We shall hardly need you all to ourselves now that we have moved into private quarters," added Sally, "but I shall be glad if you will look in upon us often to see if anything is wanted."

"And about that letter to Dan the Swatter," suggested Blair. "Don't you need to make any change in it? Wouldn't it be better for you to meet Dan here, in your own house, than in such a public place as Black Jack Yattaw's bumboat?"

"Of course it would," returned Jenkins. "Give me the letter, and I'll make the necessary changes. I'll tell him to call here immediately—before he makes a fool of himself further."

The desired correction was duly made and the On-the-Wing then secured the letter anew on his person and vanished.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ON-THE-WINGS, VISIT THE BARONET.

"Is Phil Armour in it, Sir Charles?"

The baronet shook his head.

"Then you are not going to invest in stock-yards?"

"Not at present, sir."

"But there's nothing wrong in what we've said to-day about a probable sale of the great Wizard Silver Mine to your syndicate?"

"No, sir," returned the baronet. "While the particulars of the sale have not been actually arranged, there is every reason to believe that they will be as soon as Colonel Southman reaches the city."

"And what about the robbery of this morn-

ing, Sir Charles?" inquired another reporter, pressing nearer.

"That's a matter, sir," replied the baronet, "about which I do not care to say anything."

"Then the thieves have not been arrested?"

"Once more—please excuse me!"

"And will you be here for any length of time, Sir Charles?"

"If you reporters will not be too severe upon me," was the baronet's genial answer. "In any and every case, be assured, one and all, that I am very glad to see you, and that I will tell you everything I'm doing—just as fast as I do it."

For an hour and a half this sort of thing had been continued, the baronet and Lady Depworth having an improvised At Home for the notabilities of Chicago—not merely those of the financial and literary world, but also those of the humbler and less important fields of society and fashion.

But at length they had been left a few minutes to themselves, and they found this change very welcome.

"It is really delightful, Sylvia," said the baronet, "to be thought so well of and treated so kindly by the magnates of such a great financial center."

"Think, too, of all the generous hospitalities to which we've already been invited, Charles," returned her ladyship. "I didn't even deem that so many leading citizens of the city would so soon call upon us."

"These calls are the direct result of the immense and kindly publicity which has been given our presence in America," continued Sir Charles. "The newspapers see in me a man who is likely to be of some use to the community and seem to regard it as a duty and a pleasure to make us welcome."

A knock which resounded lightly at the entrance of their room brought a smile to their faces.

"Fortunately, the task of entertaining such visitors is too much a labor of love to ever become tiresome," whispered the baronet, with grateful lightness of heart, and with this he opened the door.

Captain Gordon Swopp, the chief of the English On-the-Wings, stood on the threshold, inclining his handsome figure profoundly.

He was attired *de rigueur*, and presented a very gentlemanly and commanding appearance.

"Walk in, sir," invited the baronet, with the air of being intently struck by the aspect of his visitor.

Captain Swopp complied, the baronet closing the door behind him, and waving him to a chair with quiet politeness.

"I think it desirable for us to become personally acquainted, Sir Charles, 'about this time,' as the almanacs say," observed the English On-the-Wing, with another graceful inclination of his handsome figure. "Here is my home address."

The card which accompanied the remark read as follows:

"CAPTAIN GORDON SWOPP,

Chief of the On-the-Wing Detectives,

Empire Building, LUDGATE CIRCUS,
Rooms 18 and 19, London, E. C."

The baronet smiled in a perfectly respectful manner, but nevertheless with the air of contemplating a back number.

"You are the seventh detective who has called upon me in the last two hours, Captain Swopp," he said, "and really there's nothing to say in this line, and still less to do. But please be seated."

The visitor sat down, with the air of being quite at his ease, and of having very important business which had not yet been even hinted at.

"I am the first of my kind, Sir Charles, who has been here in his proper character," remarked Swopp, "and it is needless to say that I shouldn't be here at all unless I were in a position to give you some valuable information, and render you a service. In one of his assumed characters, that of Mr. Stark, a newspaper reporter, my American partner has already had the pleasure of seeing you."

He was interrupted by an ejaculation of surprise from the baronet.

"In Heaven's name, Sylvia, come here," said Sir Charles, turning to his wife. "It seems that we have been figuring in a masquerade without knowing it. Let me present to you Captain Swopp, who, as you will see at a glance, is one of our countrymen. Captain Swopp, Lady Depworth."

The introduction was very cordially acknowledged by her ladyship, who accepted a chair her husband advanced for her use.

"Do you mean to say, Captain Swopp," she demanded, "that Mr. Stark is really a detective?"

"A partner of mine, my lady, and the head of our whole organization!"

The baronet and his wife opened their eyes in astonishment.

"This accounts, then, for the great service he has rendered us," commented the latter.

"We've puzzled ourselves greatly to form some rational theory as to who and what Mr. Stark could really be!"

"Good," commented Swopp. "The ice being thus broken," he added, arising, "let me present Mr. Stark to you in his true character."

Stepping to the door, he drew it open, and Bolly Blair came in, *en grande tenue*, smiling and bowing to his host and hostess.

"Mr. Stark, the reporter, to be sure," greeted Sir Charles, "but Mr. Stark no longer! You are here, of course, to give us your right name and address."

"Certainly, and here it is, Sir Charles," replied the chief of the On-the-Wings, producing a modest piece of pasteboard, at which the baronet glanced with an excited shrug of the shoulders, then passing it to his wife.

"What! Bolly Blair?" exclaimed her ladyship. The On-the-Wing smilingly assented.

"But you told us you had never met Bolly Blair."

"Nor has he," interrupted the baronet, with a hearty laugh. "How can a man meet himself?"

He advanced another chair nearer, he and her ladyship sitting down in front of the two detectives.

"We're very glad, I'm sure, to know you in your own proper semblance, Mr. Blair," he declared, "and we realize now that it wasn't exactly by accident or guess-work that you recovered our money from Dan the Swatter."

"No, Sir Charles," returned Blair. "It was simply by foreseeing what would happen, and being at the right place at the right time, that Captain Swopp and I were able to restore the missing bag to you."

"Ah, Captain Swopp helped you?"

"He's the center, Sir Charles," responded Bolly Blair, "from which has come the whole movement. Would you think, to look at him, that he has accompanied you from London without asking you permission?"

"And why, if you please?" demanded her ladyship, with the air of being deeply lost in wonder.

"Because he foresaw that all these articles in the newspapers would call an army of crooks around you," explained Blair, "and because he believed that some of them would be able to accomplish about what has been done. Did you ever hear of a noted London crook named Hi Jenkins, Sir Charles?"

"Of course, Mr. Blair, and who hasn't?"

"Are you aware that Hi Jenkins has accompanied you to America, in the same steamer or otherwise?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"But didn't you and her ladyship have a couple of visitors this morning who claimed to belong to the highest English aristocracy?" continued the On-the-Wing.

A new light broke upon Sir Charles and Lady Depworth at this question.

"I see what you are coming to, Mr. Blair," said the baronet. "In fact, my wife and I had our suspicions. You mean to tell us that Baron Bigland and Lady Chidder are impostors."

"Yes, Sir Charles—frauds of the worst description," declared the On-the-Wing. "They are, in fact, Hi Jenkins, and his equally notorious daughter, Mrs. Sally Rimmer."

Sir Charles looked startled, while Lady Depworth was too horrified to speak. The unsavory reputation of the couple being well known to her.

"You haven't the least doubt of their identity, I suppose, Mr. Blair?" she asked.

"Not the slightest, my lady," replied the On-the-Wing. "The real Baron Bigland landed at Vancouver yesterday, and has been heard from, while the real Lady Chidder is known to be in England."

"And how annoying it is to reflect," complained the baronet, "that these frauds have had the gall to lodge themselves next door to us!"

"No, that's the work of Captain Swopp and myself," explained Blair. "We made our arrangements to this effect before either you or they came. We had them lodged there so as to have them under our eyes, and also," he added, smilingly, "not a little under our ears."

"In other terms," confirmed Captain Swopp, "we have been listening to their confidences, and are duly enlightened in regard to their projects."

"Then your room is between us and them?" asked her ladyship.

"At our request," acknowledged Blair. "We are registered under a couple of German names, with the knowledge and assistance of the hotel, to which I am regularly attached in the capacity of a detective."

"But, do you mean to tell us that you took rooms for us here, so to speak, before our arrival?" demanded the baronet in amazement.

Bolly Blair nodded.

"And also for Jenkins and his daughter before they put in an appearance?"

Blair nodded again.

"In other terms, you made your arrangements to save us from those crooks before we had even reached the hotel?" pursued Sir Charles.

"Such is indeed the case, sir."

"Give us all the particulars of your action." The On-the-Wing proceeded to do so.

"Good! But there is another favor we must ask of you," said her ladyship. "Those frauds are going to call upon us, by special invitation, at seven o'clock this evening, and I must beg of you not to let them come near us!"

"They will not trouble you," returned the On-the-Wing, "for the simple reason that they left the hotel not long after dinner, going into private quarters. I had overheard enough of their plans to know that they intended to rob you, and that fact made it obligatory upon me to rid the hotel of them."

"But, what was their plan, Mr. Blair?" asked Sir Charles. "How did they expect to rob me?"

"One of their ideas was to reach you through Mr. Bullinger," explained the On-the-Wing. "Are you aware, Sir Charles, that he gave the Rimmer woman five hundred dollars a few minutes before you went to his room to look after your correspondence?"

"No, sir! Did he do that?"

"I overheard her boasting of the fact to her father."

"Why, he told me that he hadn't seen her," declared Sir Charles, looking even more pained than surprised.

"Then he lied to you," assured Blair, "for both Captain Swopp and myself saw her go to his room a few minutes before you did."

"The poor fool!" commented the baronet, with a groan. "Do you think, Mr. Blair, that he is aware of the woman's scandalous identity?"

"Not at all, sir. He believes her to be the real Lady Chidder, and that accounts in part for his infatuation."

"Then you think he's really smitten with her, Mr. Blair?" asked Lady Depworth.

"He surely is, my lady," replied the On-the-Wing, "or he wouldn't have told her that Sir Charles intended to draw half a million in cash this morning, and so inspired her with a desperate hope of getting her hands upon it, through the secretary, or otherwise."

"What! he told her that?" cried the baronet, excitedly.

"He certainly did, sir."

"Then he can no longer be a secretary of mine, as dear as his father was to me," declared Sir Charles, sternly. "I'll call him to account and dismiss him the moment he returns from the brief outing I have given him. It is dangerous to have such a man around."

"We came here to make a suggestion to this effect, as in duty bound, after all we've overheard," said Blair, "and shall be very glad if you will take this and all other necessary precautions."

Bolly Blair arose at this moment, as if the business for which he came had been duly transacted, and his associate followed his example.

"Need I protest, gentlemen," said Sir Charles, as he also arose, as did his wife, "that I shall insist upon paying you well for the services you have rendered me, as also for those I now ask you to continue to render? I begin to see how you came by your name of On-the-Wing. While other detectives wait till the horse is stolen before offering their services, you lock the stable-door upon your own account before the animal is missing?"

"That's about a fair statement of our system, Sir Charles," admitted Blair, "and I think you will agree with us that it is the best system possible."

"I do indeed, gentlemen."

And with this the two On-the-Wings took a cordial leave, merely reminding Sir Charles that they could be found next door when wanted.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SECRETARY'S TEMPTATION.

THE shadow inseparable from the change in their status was not long in making its appearance on the faces of Hi Jenkins and his daughter.

"I wish we had staid in London," ejaculated the crook, almost fiercely, as he came to a halt at one of the windows of the parlor, after a thorough exploration of the premises.

"Nevertheless, we've simply taken a chance that was worth a trial," returned Sally, with a critical glance at her reflection in a long mirror.

"But how are we to live in America, if we don't get hold of some of the baronet's money?"

"We don't need to live here, and have no call in that direction," returned Mrs. Rimmer. "We'll go back to London in a few days, whether the baronet eludes us or not. In the mean time there is no occasion to worry. We have sufficient cash on hand to take us home, and if we hadn't, I could doubtless get it of Fred Bullinger. It is even possible that he may ask me to marry him."

"In that case, he'd soon know that you are not the real Lady Chidder."

"But by that time I'd have him in such a pocket that he wouldn't claim to be any better than I am," declared Sally, with a grim smile, suggestive of the hidden depths in her nature.

"But leave him to me, father—and in fact everything else. You've no occasion to fret about anything. I'll pull you through. If the secretary gets my letter—"

Her father interrupted her.

"Evidently he has got it," he said, "for here he comes."

Sally hastened to look from the window.

"Sure enough," she said. "How fast he walks! He looks troubled, too! Slip in the back parlor, father, and plant yourself in a good position to listen."

The crook acted upon the suggestion, closing the folding-doors behind him, while Sally hastened to meet Bullinger at the entrance and gave him admittance.

He was troubled, as she had noticed, his features displaying an anxiety she had never before seen upon them.

Greeting her politely, he accompanied her into the parlor, taking a comprehensive glance at his surroundings.

"You are indeed well fixed here," he remarked, accepting the chair offered him. "You've made a change for the better."

He wiped his damp brow nervously, and continued:

"I found the few lines you passed under the door, my lady, and have come as soon as I could to tell you the misfortune which has overtaken me."

His manner was so ominous that Sally hastened to call her father and repeat what the visitor had stated.

"The fact is, my friends," continued Bullinger, "I returned from my outing just in time to find Sir Charles and Lady Depworth engaged in a conversation with a couple of detectives."

"But that may not have referred to you at all," suggested Sally.

"No, merely to the stolen bag," confirmed Jenkins.

Bullinger shook his head.

"I wish I could think so," he responded, "but I can't. I arrived just in time to hear her ladyship ask: 'Then you think he's really smitten with her, Mr. Blair?' 'He surely is' replied the detective, and then he went on to repeat what I told you about the baronet's intention of drawing half a million in money."

The father and daughter exchanged glances, looking startled.

"Then the detectives have been watching us, and listening to our conversations?" recognized Sally.

"Evidently enough," returned Bullinger.

"But how could they do this?" demanded Hi Jenkins.

"They were in the room between yours and that of the baronet, and they went back to it after the interview was ended."

"But how did you overhear what you have reported, Fred?" asked Sally, recovering her equanimity at the thought that her admirer had not discovered her identity.

"In the most natural manner possible, my lady," answered the secretary—"that is to say, hearing strange voices within the baronet's room, I paused at the door to listen, placing my ear at the keyhole."

"And what else did you hear?"

"The baronet went on to say that he'd call me to account and dismiss me the moment I returned from my outing."

"And he has done so?" sighed Sally.

"Not yet, for the reason, that I refrained from presenting myself to him. It occurred to me to give his wrath a chance to cool, and to also afford myself an opportunity of laying my case before you, and possibly getting a hint for my guidance."

"That was wise," commented Sally. "Sir Charles hasn't discharged you from his service?"

"I haven't given him the chance."

"Perhaps he'll think better of it," suggested Jenkins.

"Oh, no. The blow is sure to fall when he sees me."

"How will you be situated in that case?" asked Sally. "Will you desire me to return the money you loaned me this morning?"

"Oh, no. I still have enough to take me back to England."

"But why should you go back?" insinuated Sally, bending nearer, and bringing all the witcheries of her beauty to bear upon him. "If the baronet dismisses you, why shouldn't you come here and make your home with us, at least for the present?"

"May I, my lady?"

"Yes—if you will call me Lallie, as I suggested this morning."

"Then I will certainly come," declared the dupe, his face flushing excitedly.

"There are so many things, you know, that we might do together," continued Sally, caressing his hand, in pretended abstraction. "As you are aware, Fred, they are already preparing for a great World's Fair in this city, and splendid chances will soon be opened to every one to make a fortune suddenly. You needn't be cast down, even if Sir Charles turns against you. Papa and I will be your friends. But wouldn't the baronet soften his dismissal by making you a present of a few thousands, if you were to make a suggestion to this effect?"

"Certainly not. He wouldn't give me a penny under any circumstances."

"Not after all your long years of service?"

"That doesn't matter. Sir Charles is rigor itself, if he thinks he has been injured."

"But you haven't injured him. You have served him faithfully for years. And why should he quarrel with a passing confidence you have made to a lady of my standing which is of no account whatever?"

"It is certainly very hard, Lallie," said the dupe. "But there is no way in which I can help myself."

"Isn't there?" and she sunk her voice to a whisper, making a gesture for her father to leave the room. "Didn't Sir Charles draw that half million?"

The secretary assented.

"Do you know where it is?"

"Yes, in a small grip which has been deposited in a bureau drawer in his bedroom."

"Couldn't you get hold of that money?"

Bullinger looked less shocked than pleased at the suggestion.

"I know I surprise you," she went on hurriedly, "but I'm thinking only of the wrong Sir Charles proposed to do you, and of your many years of faithful and illy-requited services. If papa and I could reach our resources, we'd do anything in the world for you, but since that is impossible, why shouldn't you make a bold stroke for your own benefit and protection?"

"Are you serious, Lallie?"

"Never more so!"

"And wouldn't you despise me if I were to confess that I have been thinking of the very thing you have suggested?"

"Never! To the contrary, I should respect you as a man who knows when he is well treated, and who is prepared to take his rights by force when they are not given him peacefully."

"Ah, how good of you!" sighed the dupe, seizing her hand. "Shall I confess to you why this temptation comes over me with such resistless power?"

"Yes, yes, Fred!"

"It is because I realize how happy we could be with each other, if we only had this half million!"

"We could indeed!" returned the temptress, throwing her arms around him and kissing him, with pretended impulsiveness. "But can you get hold of that money without being seen and get away with it without being intercepted?"

"I believe so, dear Lallie," answered the secretary. "There is certainly a good chance for me, the bedroom of the baronet being near an angle of the court, and readily accessible from the corresponding room around the corner. Without bothering you with details, let me say that I've thought the matter over thoroughly, and haven't a doubt of being able to get away with that half million."

"Is your plan fully matured?"

"Yes, Lallie. Instead of presenting myself to Sir Charles and taking my discharge, I'll keep out of sight."

Sally drew a long sigh of relief.

If her dupe should indeed take this course, thus preventing the baronet from telling him her secret, she would be safe.

"What I shall do," pursued Bullinger, "is to return to the hotel between daylight and dark, and watch for a chance. If seen, nothing will be thought of it, as I'm still a guest as also the baronet's secretary."

He arose, drawing Sally's slight figure to his breast, and added:

"Of course I may fail, and in that case our dream is ended. But if I succeed, as is probable, I'll soon be with you again."

And with this he pressed the adventuress to his heart a moment, snatching a kiss from her lips, and took his departure.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HARRY CALLS UPON SIR CHARLES.

THE door had scarcely closed upon the two detectives when Lady Depworth dropped into a chair, covering her face with her hands.

The haunting, all-absorbing thought which their presence had interrupted came surging back upon her soul—the thought of her missing daughter!

"What a pity," she sighed, "that we were so bewildered by what they told us! Otherwise we should have brought up the subject of recovering Alphie."

"Oh, we shall see them again before the day's ended," returned the baronet, caressing her tenderly.

"You still think we shall find her?"

"Why not, Sylvia? He who gave can restore."

"But what if she should come back to us ignorant—even vicious—such a girl, in fact, as Dawling Caddle would have gladly made her to intensify his revenge upon us? I shudder at the thought."

"I hope and believe that such will not be the case, Sylvia," declared Sir Charles, with an earnest conviction which could not have failed of communicating itself to his wife. "Until we actually know to the contrary, we are warranted in believing that she will come back to us with all the charms and graces with which your fond mother-heart has ever endowed her."

"Oh! that it may be so!"

A flood of tears invaded the eyes of the beautiful woman, as she raised them pleadingly to

heaven, and her form became tremulous with unutterable emotion.

"I thought of her repeatedly while the detectives were here," resumed the baronet, after two or three turns in the room, "but I shrunk from bringing in a matter of this importance at the end of an interview. We'll talk to these gentlemen of Alphie when the crooks are not quite so thick around us, and when our callers are not so numerous."

The knock which resounded at the entrance at this moment seemed to confirm this view of things.

"You see how it would have been, Sylvia," said Sir Charles with a smile, proceeding to open the door, while Lady Depworth retired to the adjoining bedroom to recover her wonted calmness.

What a charming picture was that the baronet had under his gaze!

In the foreground stood Harry Southman, and close behind him Alphie Gilford, with her hand in trustful touch with his arm—both of them as radiant as freshly blown roses, proud and happy in their new relations, and showing in every glance that they were supremely indifferent to everything in the world except each other.

"Come in," invited Sir Charles, without waiting for the slightest query in regard to his identity or the smallest announcement of their own.

He waved them into his sitting-room, a sympathetic smile mantling his face.

"Thank you, Sir Charles," returned Harry, drawing Alphie's arm within his own and striding across the threshold with the air of a Roman Emperor, making his triumphal entrance into the Eternal City. "Permit me, darling."

Depositing his betrothed in a large easy-chair, he placed a footstool under her feet, and then drew his handsome figure erect, with another inclination to the baronet.

"It shows how well the newspapers are doing their work to-day, Sir Charles," he continued. "When I can recognize you from an inch-and-a-half cut in yesterday's *Tribune*. Allow me to add that I am Harry Southman, the son of your correspondent, Colonel Archy Southman, of the Wizard Silver Mine."

"I am delighted to meet you personally, Mr. Southman," returned the baronet, in his most genial tones, compressing the hand of his visitor a moment within his own.

"And this young lady," he added, turning gracefully to Alphie, "is your sister, I presume, if I may trust the family likeness?"

"She is nearer to me than that, Sir Charles," corrected Harry, with joyous pride, as also with a roguish smile, "for she has agreed to take me for better or for worse before I am a week older. Darling, Sir Charles Depworth; Sir Charles, my future wife, Miss Gilford."

The baronet's greeting was not the less hearty on account of his palpable error respecting the family likeness, nor was the girl's manner in the least embarrassed by this mistake.

To the contrary, her musical laugh filled the room, as she extended her dainty hand to Sir Charles, and proceeded to assure him in tones of unmistakable sincerity how pleased she was to make his acquaintance.

"Sit down, my dear Mr. Southman," invited the baronet, advancing a chair. "If you will both kindly excuse me a moment, I will see if Lady Depworth is visible."

Passing into the room to which his wife had retreated, he closed the door behind him, with the air of having a *bonne bouche* to enjoy with her.

"It seems that Colonel Southman has arrived safely, Sylvia," he said, in a low tone, "and has sent his son to me to announce the fact. The young gentleman has brought along his future wife with him, and I must say that they are about the handsomest couple I've ever encountered. I want you to see them."

"With pleasure, Charles. Return to them—I'll be with you in a moment."

Sir Charles had barely reported to his visitors when his wife made her appearance.

Introductions and greetings having been duly exchanged, the baronet seated himself near Harry, while Lady Depworth conducted Alphie to a handsome satin-covered sofa, taking a seat beside her.

"I have the pleasure of informing you, Sir Charles," said Harry, proceeding directly to business, "that my father has arrived, and is very anxious to see you as soon as an interview can be arranged. He would have come to you in person, but we have had a deadly peril on hand ever since leaving Silver Island—the crew threatening to seize the schooner and the silver—and father does not dare come ashore till after our bullion has been landed."

"Indeed?" commented the baronet, with keen interest. "You must have brought along with you a large amount of it?"

"The whole output of the last ten months, sir, of the value of half a million of dollars," explained Harry. "We not only thought it advisable to show it, to you, as a sample of what the Wizard has done, but we are under the necessity of disposing of this bullion to meet our obligations."

"But about the plot of the crew to seize it,"

inquired the baronet. "Are the rascals well under control and duly watched?"

"Oh, yes, and we do not expect to have any further trouble with them, now that the schooner has reached port safely."

"The colonel does not expect to come ashore, then, till morning?"

"No, Sir Charles," replied Harry, "but he thought you might be inclined to come off to him and discuss the proposed deal in all its bearings. If such is indeed your inclination, I shall be glad to show you the way."

"Where is the schooner lying?"

"In the Outer Harbor, just about east of Van Buren street."

The baronet turned to his wife.

"Shall I go, now, Sylvia, or wait to see the colonel here?" he asked. "I mean can you spare me?"

"Yes, Charles," replied her ladyship, "since business is the first thing to be considered, in view of the colonel's precarious situation and his many anxieties."

"Then I will go," decided the baronet, "and if Fred has returned he shall accompany me."

Excusing himself to his visitors, he proceeded to the door of the secretary's apartment, but came back with a movement of the head indicative of displeasure.

"Mr. Bullinger is making the most of his brief leave of absence," he reported. "I'm sorry he's still absent."

"That may not matter, Sir Charles," suggested Harry, "since Miss Gilford and I are perfectly willing to accompany you to and from the schooner. We both intend to go to the theater this evening, but there is ample time for us to dispose of this business matter before doing so."

"Let me make a suggestion," interposed Lady Depworth, who had hardly been able to remove her gaze from Alphonse's face since the first moment of their acquaintance. "Suppose you leave your betrothed in my care, Mr. Southman, till you come back from the schooner with my husband!"

"What do you say, darling?" asked the lover, turning upon the maiden a glance that was tenderness itself.

"I—I wouldn't have believed such a thing possible when we came here," faltered Alphonse, her lustrous eyes lingering upon the face of Lady Depworth, as if fascinated. "But if you are sure you can spare me for just a little while, I'll stay, precious!"

"You shall, darling."

He opened his arms to her, and she nestled on his breast.

"But I'll soon be back," he promised.

"And I'll have such a nice, nice visit with this dear lady while you are gone, precious!"

Neither seemed to remember the presence of their host and hostess, in whose eyes had gathered a moisture suggestive of the deepest appreciation and sympathy.

The baronet turned his attention to getting ready, his wife assisting him, and the bustle of their united movements brought the lovers back to a consciousness of their surroundings.

"Of course they'll be back in time for supper, my dear child," said Lady Depworth, with thoughtful kindness, when she again caught the maiden's eye, "and we'll all go to the theater together, if business will permit. Won't that be pleasant?"

"Oh, ever so nice, thank you," returned Alphonse. "You understand, Harry?"

"Of course I do, sweetest."

Another series of caresses were exchanged by the lovers, and Sir Charles then kissed his wife and led the way from the apartment.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ALPHIE AND LADY DEPWORTH.

NOT until Harry had passed around an angle of the corridor leading to the elevator, did Alphonse retreat into the sitting-room, closing the door behind her.

"What do you think of him, my lady?" she asked, coming to a halt in the center of the apartment, in such an attitude as to bring out all her grace and beauty.

"I think he's very nobly endowed, and very fine-looking," answered her ladyship, her glances still lingering upon the beautiful form under them.

"It's right to call you 'my lady,' isn't it?"

Lady Depworth smilingly assented.

"Would it be wrong to call you madam?"

"Not at all, Miss Gilford. Madam is a fit term with which to address any lady, even if she's a queen or an empress."

"Thank you, madam. But I think it will suit me better to call you 'my lady.' Do you know why I insisted on coming up here to see you?"

"I suppose it's because you didn't want to remain away from Mr. Southman," answered her ladyship, her smile deepening as she motioned the maiden to resume her seat on the sofa.

"Yes, that's one reason," admitted Alphonse, whirling a chair around and planting herself in it, thus placing herself in front of her hostess. "But I had another. I wanted to see what a real lady was like!"

"And now that you have seen me?"

"I must say that I'm disappointed in you," avowed Alphonse, gravely.

"Indeed? Tell me why."

"I thought you'd be awfully stuck up and distant, and give me barely one little nod of recognition, without saying a word to me."

"Then you really think better of me than you expected to?"

"Yes, indeed! You seem just as kind and pleasant as you can be. I don't see as you are the least bit proud of being the wife of a baronet. And Sir Charles, too—how nice he is! Does he always kiss you in that fashion when he leaves you?"

"Always, my child."

"Even when he leaves you for only a few minutes?"

Her ladyship assented.

"He must think all the world of you!"

"He does, I admit."

"How long have you been married?"

"Just twenty years!"

"Oh, I wouldn't think it!" protested Alphonse, her glances settling again upon the sweet, sad face. "Does Sir Charles love you as much now as he did twenty years ago?"

"Yes, more."

"Why is that, my lady?"

"Because we know each other now better than we did then; because every day brings some new tie to draw us nearer to each other; because all our experiences cause us to appreciate each other more and more."

"Oh, how nice that is!" sighed the girl, her lustrous eyes dancing with delight. "I wonder if Harry will think as much of me twenty years hence, as he does at this moment?"

"I have no doubt he will. Have you known him long?"

"Oh, almost three years, although not very constantly, as he has been up in his old mine," she added poutingly, "and I've been at school."

"How long have you been engaged to him?" asked her ladyship.

Alphonse glanced at a clock on the mantel-piece, and then at a beautifully ornamented gold watch she carried.

"Well, my lady, I've been engaged to Harry just about four hours and a half," she then answered.

Lady Depworth murmured her surprise at the shortness of the period.

"But I could have been engaged longer to him, my lady, if I hadn't been a fool," continued Alphonse, with a grave smile. "I wanted him, and he wanted me, and he proposed to me seven weeks ago, but there was another girl who wanted him, and she told me the biggest pack of lies about him that ever was invented, and I was silly enough to be fretted and annoyed by them to the extent of telling Harry 'No' when I really meant 'Yes.'"

"But he thought enough of you to ask you again?"

"He did, my lady, and it's not strange that he did, considering the awful fix in which he found me, just ready to go to the bottom of the lake! But there are tears in your eyes, my lady, and you look at me in such a singular manner! Oh, can it be, Lady Depworth, that I have said or done anything to offend you? If so forgive me! I did not mean it!"

She darted up like a flash, clasping her hands, and stood in an almost trembling attitude before her ladyship.

"Forgive me," she repeated.

"There, there, child! There's nothing to forgive," cried Lady Depworth, extending her hand and drawing the bright young figure down beside her. "These tears came into my eyes because of a burning desire—a wild yearning—which entered my soul when my eyes first rested upon you, and which will probably never leave me again!"

"What sort of a yearning, my lady?" asked Alphonse, her arms stealing gently around the sorrowing mother.

"I wish that I could have had a daughter like you!"

"Then you have none?"

Lady Depworth sobbed a negative.

"No children whatever."

"None, child."

"Oh, that's too bad," commented Alphonse, her eyes brimming over sympathetically. "I am very sorry for you. May—may I kiss you?"

"If you wish to, my child."

"I do, I do—oh, ever so much," and Alphonse threw herself sobbingly upon the neck of her new friend, kissing her again and again. "It is strange how your glance goes down into my soul, and how your touch thrills me. Oh! that you could have been my mother! What love there would have been between us! What a glad life would have been ours!"

"Amen to everything you have said, my dear child," murmured Lady Depworth, returning the girl's caresses, and making an effort to recover her self-control and calmness. "But do you mean to tell me that you are motherless?"

"Yes, my lady—motherless."

The answer startled Lady Depworth.

Dashing the tears from her eyes, she put the girl at arm's-length from her, and bent a long gaze upon her face, as if upon an oracle of fate, her entire soul seeming focused in that scrutiny.

"I cannot tell you, Miss Gilford," she communicated breathlessly, "how deeply my heart has been stirred by your presence. Your eyes, your hair, your every feature—your very form even—everything about you is precisely the realization of the ideal which has haunted me for months of my lost daughter."

"Your lost daughter!" echoed Alphonse wildly. "Did you ever lose a daughter, my lady?"

"Yes, sixteen years ago—a girl who, if she lives, is now about your age," answered Lady Depworth brokenly. "She was stolen from us by a cruel enemy when a mere child, and all our efforts to find her have been fruitless."

"How strange!" ejaculated Alphonse, her agitation increasing. "Your story seems the counterpart of mine. I never knew my parents. I was stolen from them!"

"Impossible!"

"It's God's truth!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW THE LIGHT CAME.

THE eyes of Alphonse and Lady Depworth met in a long, wild glance of inquiry.

"Let us look into this matter a little, Miss Gilford, proposed the latter. "It's too much to hope, of course, that you are my missing child, or that you would come back to me in this manner. But there may be further points of similarity in our stories. Where do you live?"

"Near Muskegon, on the east shore of the lake," answered Alphonse.

"Who do you live with?"

"With my reputed father, Derby Gilford, who owns a large farm, and his step-son, Florian. They have both acknowledged to me that I am in no wise related to them."

"And Mrs. Gilford?"

"She died seven years ago."

"Then how did you secure the accomplishments you evidently possess?"

"Through Mrs. Cullerton, a very kind neighbor, who was always like an own mother to me. Mr. Gilford wanted to bring me up in ignorance, as a drudge in the kitchen, but Mrs. Cullerton wouldn't let him."

"Ah, indeed!"

Lady Depworth stirred with an interest like that of a benighted traveler who sees a light in the distance.

"The step-son, Florian Gilford," resumed Alphonse, "after figuring for years as the meanest and most selfish of brothers, has lately been posing as a sutor for my hand, as the result of a scare Derby Gilford received about six weeks ago in Chicago."

"Is it possible?" breathed Lady Depworth, with increased interest. "Did you learn the nature of that scare?"

"Yes, my lady. He was seen by some one who knew him."

"Who—knew him?"

"Under his old name, I mean, my lady," explained Alphonse, "for his name of Derby Gilford, it seems, is an assumed one."

The information was received with a violent start of comprehension.

"And that 'old name,' my child?" queried her ladyship, with forced calmness. "Have you ever heard it?"

"Never."

"You've no idea what it is?"

"Not the slightest. But there's a history behind it, my lady, which has made both of the Gilmores very anxious for my marriage with Florian, and no longer ago than yesterday the step-son threatened me with all sorts of vengeance if I dared to reject him."

"In telling you that you are not a Gilford," said Lady Depworth, "these plotters must of course have offered some explanation as to how you came into their hands, and possibly as to who and what you are. Tell me all you know on these points."

"I'm afraid I do not know a great deal, my lady," replied Alphonse. "Florian did indeed tell me yesterday that I am the only child of wealthy and distinguished parents, who are expected to arrive in Chicago within a day or two from England, but I could get no particulars. He offered to tell me who they are if I would agree to marry him, but I refused to give him any such promise, and was soon afterward enabled to make my escape from him, eventually being rescued from my foundering sharpie by Colonel Southman and Harry."

"What sort of a man is Derby Gilford?" asked her ladyship, who had become very keenly absorbed. "Describe him."

Alphonse did so.

"You have no photograph of him?"

"No, my lady. He has refused persistently to sit for one."

"Has he been anything like a father to you?"

"No, to the contrary. He has always seemed cruel and venomous. I have always thought that he hates me."

Lady Depworth stirred again, the pallor which had invaded her features deepening every moment.

She seemed to find in every word of the maiden the confirmation of her own thoughts and theories.

"Did Florian admit," she resumed, "that you were stolen from your parents?"

"No, my lady, but he couldn't contradict me when I told him that such was certainly the truth."

"How long has Derby Gilford lived on this farm near Muskegon?"

"Just sixteen years."

Her ladyship echoed the words, with another violent start.

"And he took you there with him?"

The maiden assented.

"This is indeed suggestive," commented Lady Depworth. "Just sixteen years have passed since our daughter was stolen from us, and we were then in this city. What would have been more natural than for the abductor to make his escape down the lake and bury himself in a rustic wilderness."

She reflected a few moments intently, and then continued:

"Do you know where your reputed father lived before he settled near Muskegon?"

"No, my lady, nor does any one else," replied Alphie. "He has always been as dumb as an oyster respecting his past!"

"But don't you remember anything about your real parents, Miss Gilford?"

The maiden shook her head sadly.

"Only a dream-like memory of a lady like you bending over me and caressing me," she then murmured, with the air of exploring the depths of her soul.

"None of the little clothes you wore have been preserved?"

"No, my lady."

"Nor a tiny necklace or other article of ornament?"

Again Alphie shook her head.

"But don't you remember the name your real parents gave you?"

"That is indeed possible," replied Alphie, "and your ladyship will not wonder at it, when I mention it, it is so peculiar and unusual. It seems that this name had become so firmly rooted in my mind that my abductors were unable to make me forget it, and hence they were forced to allow me to retain it."

"Yes—yes! And that name?"

"It is Alphie."

"Alphie?" repeated her ladyship, with a wild scream. "Oh, my God! At last! at last!"

Half starting up, with outstretched hands and arms, Lady Depworth made an attempt to inclose the girl in an embrace, but the joyful shock which had come upon her was too much for human endurance, and in another moment she lay insensible in the arms of Alphie.

"Ah, merciful Heaven!" came from the startled girl. "Can it be that she recognizes me as her lost daughter? Yes, yes! Such is indeed the case! She is my mother! Thank God!"

And she too fainted, the couple lying as if dead, just as the door leading from the hall was thrown open abruptly and a man appeared on the threshold.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE STOLEN HALF MILLION.

THE new-comer was the unworthy secretary of the baronet, Fred Bullinger.

He burst into the room with the air of having a sufficient comprehension of the scene there presented, and a single glance at the motionless figures of Lady Depworth and Alphie seemed to confirm all his ideas and intentions.

"It's even so!" he muttered.

A few rapid strides brought him into the rear apartment and to the bureau containing the half million in money the baronet had drawn a few hours previous.

The first intention of Sir Charles had been, as we have indicated, to hand this money to Colonel Southman on account of the purchase of the Wizard Silver Mine.

Later, however, as time wore on, he had decided to hold it in reserve for any good thing that might be offered him, two of his most prominent visitors having promised to call during the evening with a proposition little short of marvelous.

As he had foreseen, the secretary found the money locked up, but the delay thus caused him was trifling.

Laying the bureau on its face, he dashed his heel through the rear of the thickest drawer, which he was sure contained the handbag, and in another moment he was in possession of the money.

Cutting the bag open, he transferred the money rapidly to a paper box in which a hat had been sent to him, and then replaced the bureau where he had found it and gave his attention to getting out of the hotel as quickly as possible.

To say the least, fortune seemed to favor him.

Not only did Alphie and Lady Depworth continue unconscious while he was stealing past them, but he traversed the various corridors necessary to his escape without meeting any one who knew him, as also without attracting any invidious notice.

Very much to his gratification a carriage was in the act of drawing up at the entrance, and he hastened to jump into it.

"Where to, sir?" inquired the driver.

"To Clark street bridge," answered the secretary guardedly.

The driver repeated the order loud enough for

it to reach the ear of a bystander who moved away so rapidly as to seem to precede the fugitive.

The drive that succeeded was a slow one, on account of the crowded state of the streets, but the carriage at length came to a halt at the destination named, just as the bridge was swung to allow of the passage of a long line of grain-loaded propellers.

"Here we are, sir," announced the driver, descending from his box and opening the door of the vehicle.

Settling his fare, the fugitive made a pretense of waiting for the draw to close, while his driver remounted his box and drove quietly away in the direction of the Palmer, but not without exchanging signals with the driver of a carriage which had reached the bridge just ahead of him.

The restless eye of Bullinger had been quick to detect the presence of this second vehicle, and he hastened to take possession of it, after an exchange of gestures with its driver, and to give a new order.

Curiously enough, this second driver repeated the address loud enough to reach the hearing of at least one of the persons standing near, and then wheeled slowly around and started for his destination.

"Evening paper, sir?" asked a newsboy at this moment, thrusting it within reach.

The fugitive assented, for several reasons, passing out a nickel, and in another instant was making a pretense of being absorbed in the perusal of the news.

Not only did he desire to give himself the appearance of an unconcerned traveler, but he thought it possible that he might find the newspaper useful as a screen against the gaze of some one he didn't care to encounter.

As he thus went his way, with the paper dancing under his eyes, at every movement of the carriage, he suddenly realized that he was not moving as rapidly as was desirable.

"Faster, driver—faster!" he ordered.

"It'll cost you double fare if I comply, sir," was the answer.

"That does not matter. Faster!"

The driver made a pretense of obeying, cracking his whip and speaking again and again to his horses, but very little came of it.

The first hindrance of a decided character proved to be a jam of loaded wagons.

Then something was wrong with one of the horses, necessitating a slow pace, and finally the driver went three or four blocks out of his way, pretending that he was not well acquainted with the neighborhood.

In due course of time, however, the carriage drew up at the vacant lot which had been indicated as its destination, and Bullinger alighted.

A single glance around made him easy on the subject of being watched and followed, and he assumed the air of a man who is at peace with himself and all the world, as he deliberately folded up his newspaper, in which he had not read a line, and thrust it into his pocket.

"I am going to visit my old grandmother, who hasn't seen me in ten years," he remarked after settling his fare, "and I didn't want to flurly her by rolling up to the door."

Nodding understandingly, the driver took his way into an adjacent saloon, from behind the blinds of which he carefully noted the direction taken by Bullinger to reach the abode of the venerable lady in question.

He did this so well, in fact, that he would have been able to swear, a few minutes later, that Fred Bullinger had disappeared into the late residence of Bolly Blair, and been received at the very door by no less a personage than Sally Rimmer, who was duly assisted and flanked by Hi Jenkins.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"COUNTING THEIR CHICKENS," ETC.

DESPITE all his efforts at self-control and calmness, Fred Bullinger was quite pale and excited at the moment of his arrival.

Yet there was a grim jubilation about him which could not have been mistaken.

He had brought the money!

A single glance into his face, as he closed the door behind him, was enough to convey this fact to the crook and his daughter.

"You have made a success of it then?" cried the latter, throwing herself into his arms.

"Even more of a success than I could have dared to hope, Lallie," he answered, caressing her.

"You have the whole half million?"

"Doubtless, although I've had no chance to count it."

"Did any one see you take it?" pursued Sally, leading the way into the parlor.

"Not a soul," replied Bullinger. "I was never so favored in my life as I have been in this business."

"Perhaps that was on my account, darling."

"I can well believe it, Lallie."

The couple seated themselves side by side on a sofa. Bullinger with his booty on his knees, and Hi Jenkins hovering near them.

"Did you go back to the hotel as soon as you left us?" resumed Sally.

"No, I went to look for a craft of some sort by which to make our escape from this 'blarst-

ed country,' with the fortune I've taken from the Yankees!"

"You did, Fred? What can have suggested that idea to you?"

"The very natural reflection that every route by land will have its dangers."

"And did you find what you wanted?"

"The very thing—a nice little sloop where we can be as comfortable as moths in a carpet. I've left it in charge of the man who sold it to me, and we shall find him waiting for us at any minute between now and midnight."

"Where is it?" asked Sally.

"I will show you."

Producing a map of Chicago, the secretary pointed out the precise spot where his sloop was in waiting.

"As you see," he added, "it's off the extreme end of the Government pier, near Black Jack Yattaw's bumboat."

"Excellent," muttered Hi Jenkins, speaking for the first time since the arrival of his new ally. "Your plan of leaving town by water and by private conveyance, after such a masterly stroke, shows that you are a genius. Give us a few details of your wonderful performance."

"Well," explained Bullinger, "I hurried to the hotel as soon as possible after buying the sloop, and was so fortunate as to reach my room unseen and unheard. Locking myself in, I kept perfectly silent, so as to convey the idea that I was still absent. The baronet came and knocked at my door, but I made no response, and he soon went away with young Southman, the latter's betrothed remaining with Lady Depworth. Then followed a scene I can't quite comprehend, but I believe it will turn out that young Southman's betrothed is her ladyship's long-missing daughter. Be that as it may, I heard excited voices, followed by a wild scream, and I ran to the baronet's room in time to find his wife and the young lady in a deathlike swoon. How promptly I got hold of the cash and vanished I need not tell you."

"You have indeed been favored," commented Jenkins. "Here you are, in safety, and I suppose we shall all remain here until after dark?"

"Yes, baron—if you and Lallie think well of it."

"Of course we do," declared Sally—"it's so much easier to act by night than in the glare of day. We had better remain quiet here till nine o'clock, when our driver will call to see if we have any use for him, and he can drive us to the sloop. In the mean time we'll have supper and discuss our plans for the future."

Sue looked from her admirer to her father, and read their approbation of her suggestions in their faces.

"And now let's sit down at the table and count the money," added Sally, "to be sure that the enemy is playing no brown paper tricks upon us."

The proposal having been duly accepted and acted upon, the trio found themselves the possessors of half a million of dollars, less a few hundreds.

It was in bills of large denomination, in the wrappers in which it had been passed out from the banks, so that it was not a difficult matter to count it.

"And now what's to be done with it?" asked Sally, her face flushing feverishly at sight of so much money.

"How done with it?" repeated her dupe.

"For its safe-keeping, I mean," explained the adventuress. "Did any one see you coming to this house?"

"No, Lallie," returned Bullinger. "I'd be willing to stake my life that I haven't left the smallest clew behind me. I took a carriage from the hotel to the Clark street bridge, and another from there to a vacant lot a couple of blocks from us which I noticed when I was here before."

"Then you really think you have been too much for those On-the-Wings?" continued Mrs. Rimmer.

"Those what?" asked the secretary, with unconcealed wonder.

Hi Jenkins gave his daughter a keen look of warning, thus suggesting to her that their dupe had not had quite so much to do with the On-the-Wings as they had.

"Those detectives, I mean," answered Sally. "You really think you've been too much for them?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"If I were perfectly sure that such is the case," resumed Mrs. Rimmer, "I would divide this money into three equal portions—as regards bulk, at least—and we would stow it away on our persons."

"But we can't be sure of any such thing," declared Hi Jenkins, "and it would be a piece of the greatest folly to proceed upon any theory of that description. What we are bound to believe is that the pursuers are close behind us, and that we've got to play a devilish smart game to keep out of their clutches. Let the recovery of the baronet's bag this morning serve as a warning and example."

These words were well calculated to make an impression upon Bullinger, and a single glance at his countenance was enough to assure Jenkins that he was not talking in vain.

"And need I tell you what the first action will be of any detective who follows Mr. Bullinger here?" pursued Hi Jenkins. "His first measure will be to search us, and in case any such thing happens, what becomes of the money concealed on our persons?"

"There was no necessity of saying another word on this subject."

"Then what would you suggest, father?" inquired Mrs. Rimmer. "You do not forget, of course, that the money is Fred's, and not ours?"

"Certainly not, but I realize that he will be thankful to us for assisting him to get out of town with it."

"The money is as much yours as mine, Lallie," protested the dupe, with the sincerity of a deep infatuation, "and you may be sure that I wouldn't have run such risks as I have for any less reward than you have promised me—a future with you which will be made enjoyable by this money. Let me ask you, therefore, to dispose of it precisely as if it were all your own."

Sally consulted her father with a single swift glance.

"The best and surest thing to do—for the next hour or two, at least, or until we see if any pursuit will be made—is to lock the money up in your sole-leather trunk," declared the crook, after a few moments of reflection. "As to the plans we shall adopt later to get it safely out of the country, we may leave them for future discussion and settlement."

"Then come, Fred," cried Sally, springing up lightly and entering the back parlor, where the baggage of the father and daughter had been left. "Here is the trunk in question. As you will see, it is a large, stout one, and it wouldn't be quite as easy to get away with it as it was with the baronet's hand-bag. Shall we lock the money up in it?"

Receiving an affirmative from her father and Bullinger, she carried out the suggestion, the two men looking on with the keenest satisfaction.

"And now let's have supper," proposed Hi Jenkins. "You needn't bother about cooking, Lallie, not even to make a pot of tea, as a bottle of wine will answer every purpose, with those supplies we brought in from the grocer and baker."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"CONFUSION WORSE CONFOUNDED."

"LEFT to themselves in the dining-room, while Sally busied herself in the kitchen, Jenkins and his proposed son-in-law became joyfully enthusiastic over the brilliant prospects before them."

"We'll go up into the Dominion and get a great ranch," suggested Jenkins. "I've long been thinking of retiring forever from fashionable society, now's an excellent time and to do so."

He was interrupted by Sally, who dispatched him to the grocery for something which had been forgotten, then retiring to the kitchen, after a pleasant remark or two to Bullinger and one of her impulsive embraces.

Thus left to himself, the secretary drew from his pocket the newspaper he had purchased, and proceeded to look it over, the thought occurring to him to see if the affair of the morning had been reported.

It was not long before his eyes encountered the name of Bigland, and it is needless to say that he instantly became absorbed in the article containing it.

He started violently, however, his face becoming deathly pale, before he had read half a dozen lines.

The article in question was a very complete if not lengthy exposure of Hi Jenkins and his daughter!

It told how they had arrived at a leading hotel as Baron Bigland and Lady Chidder, and been duly detected by the officials of the house, and forced to retire to private quarters.

It was such an account, in fact, as only Bolly Blair could have furnished.

And how Fred Bullinger stared at the details will be readily imagined.

The sudden hissing of a deadly serpent in his ear could not have filled him with more hideous emotions.

How he had been deceived!

Instead of dealing with a lady of title and quality, as he had supposed, he had been the dupe of an adventuress of the worst description.

And now what should be his future action toward the impostors?

Oh! he would play the hypocrite, too!

He would remain with them during his convenience, keeping his own counsels, and would give them quite as big a disappointment eventually as they had given him.

He would make use of their house as a hiding-place until after dark, and would then give them the slip, vanishing from their sight forever.

As he reached this conclusion, Hi Jenkins came back from his errand, looking as if he had encountered a ghost in his absence.

In his hand he clutched a newspaper, and a glance at it told Fred Bullinger what had happened.

"Come here, child!" called the crook, on reaching the dining-room.

Sally responded with a celerity suited to her father's excitement.

"The jig's up in one respect, Sally," announced Jenkins, extending the newspaper toward her. "Here's a complete exposure of us in the evening paper. We shall have to take Mr. Bullinger into our confidence."

Sally glanced at the article, and a shriek escaped her.

She seemed ready to faint.

"Take it easy, Sal," enjoined Bullinger, bitterly, flourishing the paper he had been reading. "There's no occasion to say a word about the article. I've read it."

Sally shrieked again, taking a step or two toward her late admirer with outstretched arms.

"And can you forgive me, darling, for this cruel deception?" she cried.

"I can, but only on one condition," answered her dupe, with forced calmness; "and that is that we go our separate ways. Where's the key of that trunk? I want my money!"

If anything had been needed to disenchant him with the couple, he got it now.

They bristled up in a menacing fashion on the instant.

"Your money?" sneered Sally. "Why not say the baronet's?"

"Or why not say *ours*?" demanded Hi Jenkins, laying off his coat, as if getting ready for battle.

The secretary looked from one to the other, and realized that his chances of emerging victorious from a personal struggle were not very promising.

In other terms, a compromise was the only solution open to him.

"Very well," he muttered. "I'll divide the cash with you, but only on the same condition as before—that we go our separate ways."

The father and daughter consulted in silence, with a murderous gleam in their eyes.

They had already discussed—before Bullinger's arrival—the possibility of chloroforming him to death and packing him into one of their largest trunks, and had even emptied the receptacle, so as to have it in readiness for carrying out the diabolical suggestion.

But they, too, were not long in realizing that violence was out of the question, and that a division of the money was all that could be effected with anything like safety.

The villa being only semi-detached, the people next door would be sure to overhear any conflict so near them.

"Well, we'll divide," decided Sally, after a marked hesitation, "and you can get out of here as soon as you please afterward."

She turned her black eyes almost savagely upon the perturbed countenance of her disenchanted admirer, and added:

"You're not the first dupe I've made, Mr. Fred Bullinger, and you can safely bet your bottom dollar that you are not destined to be the last!"

"Enough of this chatter," enjoined Hi Jenkins sharply. "Let's attend to business. Out with that money!"

The trunk was duly opened, all eyes settling on the spot where the stolen half million had been deposited, but that spot was now indeed an "aching void!"

The money had vanished!

The lock had not been in the least tampered with, and still less broken, nor was there the least sign of disorder about the trunk or its contents.

But the half million had none the less disappeared, with the paper-box containing it.

"Villain! This is your work!" cried Sally, starting up with the violence of a fury. "You have done this thing while father was absent and I was in the kitchen!"

"I, woman?"

The accusation needed no other answer than the aspect and manner of Fred Bullinger, as he raised his empty hands despairingly, standing as if paralyzed, his face a picture of indescribable consternation.

Nor was there the least occasion for him to return in kind their charge against him, it being easy to see at a glance that the couple were as ignorant as himself of the agency by which the money had vanished.

"I see it all!" gasped Sally. "Those On-the-Wings have tricked us! They have entered the house unseen—perhaps by a secret entrance, or with duplicate keys!"

"But how could they open the trunk and lock it again so cleverly, doing it no harm?" asked Bullinger.

"They may have had a key fitted to it by a locksmith," suggested Hi Jenkins. "There has been ample time for them to take this measure since we came to the house, if we may suppose that they have been here."

"Well, if they haven't been here, who has?" snapped Sally. "The money couldn't go without hands, could it? You can both see at a glance that those On-the-Wings have got onto us again, in their usual silent and infernal fashion!"

"In that case," muttered Jenkins, with an uneasy glance around, "we had better be look-

ing to our personal safety, all of us, sinking our quarrels and differences. Let's catch a bite of supper and vanish!"

CHAPTER XL.

THE CROOKS IN A PANIC.

ERE the suggestions of Hi Jenkins could be acted upon, the secretary started violently and bolted to the nearest window, which gave on a side street.

"If there isn't Dan the Swatter!" he ejaculated—"the man who made such a daring raid upon the baronet this morning! And I do believe he's coming here!"

"Nothing's more likely," returned Hi Jenkins. "I've written him to call as soon as possible!"

"Sure enough," added Bullinger, as the latch of the gate clicked and rapid footsteps on the walk succeeded. "I may as well be going!"

"If you are wise," returned the crook, "you'll simply beat a retreat into the back parlor, with my daughter, and tie to her upon a new basis. At any rate, you had better remain to hear what sort of news this man is bringing!"

The couple hastened to act upon the suggestion, while Jenkins took his way to the front door just in time to open it at the appearance of the visitor.

"Mr. Jenkins, of London, I believe?" greeted the American crook, giving his English *confrere* one of those smiles which mean so much more than the words accompanying them.

Hi Jenkins nodded, inviting Dan by a gesture to enter and close the door behind him.

"I got your brief note, Mr. Jenkins," continued Dan, "and have lost no time in answering it in person. You would doubtless know me from the photograph I sent you, in exchange for yours and the baronet's?"

"I should, Mr. Drindle," replied Jenkins, "although it hardly does you justice. Come into the parlor."

"One moment, please," said the Swatter, turning upon Jenkins an eye like that of a ferret. "Didn't I see Fred Bullinger—the baronet's secretary—at the window as I reached the gate?"

"You did, Mr. Drindle."

"What is he doing here, and in your company?"

The manner of the Swatter was imperative, like that of a man who does not propose to remain in any uncertainty in regard to his relations and surroundings.

"To begin with," answered Jenkins, after a brief instant of reflection, "he's here because he's smitten with my daughter. She made his acquaintance when she was figuring as 'Lady Chidder,' and he still believes in her now that he knows to the contrary."

"Put for what other reason is Mr. Bullinger here?" pursued the Swatter. "Has he been dismissed by the baronet?"

"Substantially—yes."

"What do you mean by that long word?"

"I mean that he is to be dismissed as soon as Sir Charles can get speech with him."

"What is the trouble between them?"

"Sir Charles thinks he has been too confidential with my daughter about business matters."

"Has he any more serious reason?"

"Not to my knowledge."

The couple entered the parlor and seated themselves, the Swatter appearing a prey to a keen preoccupation.

"What is your opinion of Bullinger?" he asked, in a confidential whisper. "Is he bad enough to join us in a bold stroke for fortune, if we can make it appear that a big pile of money will be his reward for doing so?"

"Of course he is," assured Jenkins.

"Has he done anything yet to show what he's made of?"

"I should say so! He has just taken half a million in cash from the baronet's bedroom, without being seen or heard, and without leaving the least clew behind him!"

The Swatter leaped to his feet excitedly, staring at his informant as he would have stared at a phantom.

"You can't be serious!" he gasped.

"I was never more serious, Mr. Drindle," declared Jenkins, with an involuntary sternness of voice and manner, as he remembered how the Swatter had interfered with his own plans by his action of the morning.

"Then he has ruined me," cried Dan, in wild dismay. "He has raised a hue and cry that will interfere with all I am doing!"

"Well, I don't care much if he has," returned Jenkins, as he also sprung to his feet. "You cut me out of the best scheme of my life this morning. I had sent you full particulars of the baronet's affair, even to his photo, and you knew I was coming to work with you—"

"But I didn't know you had arrived, Mr. Jenkins!"

"You might at least have reflected that I wouldn't be far behind the baronet. But there's no use of our quarreling. As to the 'hue and cry' with which you reproach Bullinger, let me tell you that the money may not be missed for hours, or until morning!"

"Ah! can it be—"

"Of course it can!" assured Jenkins. "It had been locked up in the baronet's bedroom, and no one witnessed its departure, the baronet being out, his wife busy with company, and all that sort of thing."

The Swatter's calmness came back to him while he was listening to these plausible assurances.

"In this case," he commented, "something can be done. In fact, we can all work together. Please call Mr. Bullinger here."

"Here I am, gentlemen," announced the secretary, advancing from the folding-doors, where he and Sally had been listening, after making a hurried peace with each other, both realizing that they had all the more reasons for sticking together in their misfortune than before the loss of the money. "What can I do for you, Mr. Drindle?"

"You can at least answer a few questions," returned the Swatter, shaking the hand offered him, and inclining himself to Sally. "Didn't you accompany Sir Charles to-day to all the banks at which he had business?"

"I did, sir."

"Then you know where his money is deposited and in what quantity?"

"Of course."

"Didn't you become known in these banks as the baronet's secretary?"

"In some of them, but not in all."

"But couldn't you cash the baronet's check in any or all of them?"

"Without the least doubt—if I can get there before any noise is made about the half-million I've stolen, or before any suspicion falls upon me."

"That's to say, if everything remains quiet until ten o'clock to-morrow. Do you think this is possible?"

"I certainly do," replied Bullinger. "The baronet and his wife are giving the most of their attention to a search for a lost daughter, and may not even discover the loss of the half-million till you have carried out all your projects."

This was not said in good faith, but to encourage the Swatter to reveal his projects.

The money having been already recovered by the On-the-Wings, it was almost certain to be returned to the baronet within an hour or two, and he would accordingly know all that had happened.

But even in this case the baronet might not denounce his ex-secretary, and this would leave him a chance to act successfully on the morrow.

"Perhaps there is still a chance for me to accomplish what I wanted to do," said the Swatter, thoughtfully, after a pause. "At any rate, I'll ask your opinions. Listen."

He beckoned the trio nearer, lowering his voice to a whisper, and resumed:

"Colonel Southman has arrived on his schooner, with half a million in silver bullion. I appeared to him at once as Bolly Blair, and have placed Bart Wyser and two men named Gilford on board as On-the-Wings to guard the silver. Half of the crew is with me, including the mate, Tom Gorkle, and so is Tom's brother, Simon Gorkle, who is waiting for me, with his sloop, near the Illinois Central shops. Sir Charles is expected to come off to the schooner to complete his deal with Colonel Southman, and will doubtless give him his checks for a couple of millions in exchange for the deeds of the 'Wizard,' which, as I understand, are all ready for delivery."

"And you want me to cash those checks?" asked Bullinger, with a startled, hopeful air, all his greed and energy coming back to him.

"Yes, that's what I want of you, in case the thing's possible," replied Dan. "What's to prevent you from coming off to the schooner immediately?"

"Nothing whatever. Where's she lying?"

"In the Outer Harbor, off Van Buren street." The Swatter glanced out into the street, which had begun to darken with the approach of night, and resumed:

"I'll wait for you, or have Simon Gorkle do so, if you'll arrive where the sloop is soon after dark."

"Thank you, but I already have a sloop of my own in waiting, and we'll all come off to the schooner in her."

"That will do as well," said the Swatter, arising, "as it leaves us more at liberty. By the way, Mr. Jenkins, I want to ask you a question. By whom did you send your note to me?"

"By Sam Furbish."

"By Sam Furbish!" echoed Dan, with a start. "If you know any man by this name, Mr. Jenkins, he must be a consummate fraud. The real Sam is in prison!"

"He was, to be sure," returned Jenkins, "but he has been pardoned out, having a 'pull,' as he has explained to me."

"Can it be? I hadn't heard of his good fortune. And how did you make his acquaintance so promptly?"

"He is driving a carriage which was sent to me in response to my demand for one," explained the English crook further. "My daughter and I have taken quite a liking to him, and we've arranged to make use of him exclusively just as long as we shall remain in Chicago."

The Swatter looked a little thoughtful and uneasy, as if he didn't comprehend how or why Sam had so suddenly taken upon himself the duties of a public servant.

"Has he reformed?" he asked.

"He would be shocked if he could hear you ask the question," said Hi. "He's figuring as a driver because of the opportunities the business affords him of doing something better. For instance, if you had not got your hands on that bag this morning, it is more than probable that Sam would have done so."

Dan looked his astonishment.

"This is all too much for me," he declared, "but I suppose you know what you are talking about, and will hope that everything is as it should be. The letter, however, was delivered to me in a very strange fashion, as I'm bound to tell you."

"Really? Tell me about it."

"Why, it was handed me by a man I don't know from Adam, and at a moment when I least expected to be recognized by a stranger."

From the explanation he proceeded to give, it appeared that the note had reached him near the shops of the Illinois Central, just after he had landed from the schooner, leaving Simon Gorkle on the sloop to watch for him, as related.

"Well, that's all right," said Jenkins. "Sam is deep enough to recognize you anywhere or under any disguise, or he may have sent the letter by some man who knows you well, but with whom you have little acquaintance."

"That may all be, but I'm not without misgivings," declared the Swatter. "Is Sam driving under his own name, or has he taken an alias?"

"He has taken an alias," replied Jenkins. "He calls himself 'Nibbs.'"

The Swatter uttered a howl like that of a wolf in a trap.

"Nibbs?" he repeated. "Nibbs the coachman! Well, you have put your foot in it, old fellow! 'Nibbs the coachman' is merely one of the many made-up characters of Bolly Blair, the chief of the On-the-Wings!"

The announcement seemed to take away the breath of his hearers.

"Did Nibbs bring you here?" continued the Swatter.

The father and daughter assented dumbly, unable to speak.

"And doubtless has agreed to come here often to drive you?"

Jenkins nodded.

An awful sneer escaped the Swatter.

"You're going straight to the bottomless pit," he lamented. "The On-the-Wings have bitched on to you, body and soul!"

He bolted for the door, with all the appearance of having been struck by a veritable panic.

"There may still be a chance for you to get away," he added, "if you handle yourselves with anything like sense. Should the road still be open, you had better get to the schooner as soon as you can. You can at least help me make a good fight for the colonel's bullion, even if all the On-the-Wings in the world should drop in upon us!"

And with this he vanished.

"You understand, both of you, why I couldn't tell him we've lost our half million?" demanded Jenkins, turning to his daughter and Bullinger. "He would have dropped us as dead weight, and not allowed us to come near him. Have you agreed to stick together?"

"Naturally," answered Bullinger. "We need each other now more than we did when our fortunes were brighter."

"That's all right," commented the crook hurriedly. "And now to get out of here—before that devilish Nibbs can put in an appearance! Lively, both of you, or we shall go the same way which has been taken by our half million!"

CHAPTER XLI.

COLONEL SOUTHMAN AND THE BARONET.

In the cabin of their schooners, Colonel Southman and his wife sat at supper, with the first shadows of the approaching night gathering around them.

Three men only were visible on the deck—Bart Wyser and the two Giffords, who, it will be remembered, were figuring as On-the-Wing Detectives.

The crew had been consigned to the fore-castle—not merely those who had stood by the colonel, but also those who had conspired to seize his bullion.

The most active man on the craft was undoubtedly Tom Gorkle, who, in the capacity of mate, was here, there, and everywhere, watching for the return of the Swatter, and taking good care to inflame the zeal of the three men who had been associated with him in the plot for casting away the schooner and stealing the silver.

"I am glad, Archy, to have the detectives here," remarked Mrs. Southman, breaking a thoughtful silence. "With the aid of Mr. Gorkle, and those of the crew who have remained faithful, they will prevent all trouble."

The colonel assented, with the air of a man

who has made all necessary arrangements for his security and safety.

"But wasn't it odd that Mr. Blair should come to our aid so soon after our arrival?" pursued Mrs. Southman, a little wonderingly.

"Oh, not at all," returned the colonel. "These On-the-Wings are ubiquitous. Their method is to keep an eye on leading crooks and meet and checkmate them at every step of their plottings. They think more of preventing crime than punishing it. How easily, for instance, Mr. Blair is now paralyzing the crooks who have been plotting against us!"

Nothing more was said until the steward had lighted the lamps and cleared the table, then retreating to his own department.

"For Alphie's sake, I would gladly have gone ashore and taken apartments at the Palmer," then said Mrs. Southman, "but she wouldn't hear of it."

"Neither would Harry, although I asked him to take you and Alphie to our old quarters," returned the colonel. "Perhaps we can prevail upon them to act in this sense when they return from the theater, and in that case you can go with them."

"As if I would do anything of the kind!" exclaimed Mrs. Southman. "I should sleep very little, I assure you, notwithstanding my faith in Mr. Blair. Ah, an arrival!"

This was caused by a slight shock which showed that a boat had come alongside.

"Mr. Blair has returned, I presume," remarked the colonel. "In any case, Mr. Gorkle will tell me if the visit is for us."

The couple listened a few moments.

"I hear Harry's voice," then said the colonel, arising. "Perhaps he has brought the baronet with him."

"This way, Sir Charles," the parents heard their son saying, at the entrance of the cabin, and the next instant the two gentlemen were in their presence.

"I have brought Sir Charles to you," resumed Harry, addressing his father and mother. "Sir Charles, Colonel and Mrs. Southman."

Greetings having been duly exchanged, the baronet accepted the chair offered him, at the same time expressing the satisfaction he experienced at meeting the colonel personally, after such a pleasant and extensive correspondence.

"And Alphie? where did you leave her, Harry?" asked Mrs. Southman, with tender solicitude.

"With Lady Depworth, mother. She and her ladyship seemed very much taken with each other, and will have a nice visit, as Alphie expressed it, before Sir Charles and I get back, and then we're all going to the theater together."

A strange cry from the baronet fixed the attention of the Southmans, and they saw that he had gained his feet, and was leaning on the cabin table, with such a changed countenance as to suggest that he had been suddenly seized by some terrible illness.

"Why, Sir Charles!" cried the colonel, stepping to his side solicitously. "What is the matter?"

"That name?" exclaimed the baronet. "Did I hear right? Did you pronounce the name of Alphie?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Harry, with a proud and happy light in his eyes.

"Who is she?"

"She's my future wife, Sir Charles—"

"And her parentage?"

"It is unknown!"

The baronet dropped into his seat even more abruptly than he had arisen from it, his features blanching to the hue of death.

"How strange!" he ejaculated. "I have never known but one family in which that name existed. Have you, colonel?"

Colonel Southman shook his head.

"I never heard the name till it was mentioned by my son, a number of months ago," he declared.

"It's the name of our lost daughter—our only child," faltered the baronet, striving to recover the mastery of his emotions. "She was stolen from us on the occasion of our first visit to Chicago, sixteen years ago, when she was three years of age, by a man named Dawling Caddle, whose terrible work was so well done that he has kept us in ignorance of her fate from that day to this."

"Ah, my God!" came from Mrs. Southman, with a burst of tears.

"How singular!" exclaimed the colonel.

"It certainly looks to me, Sir Charles, as if fate, destiny, or Providence—call it what you will—has been busy with us," avowed Harry, with an emotion nearly as great as the baronet's.

"How so, Mr. Southman?"

"Why, everything points to my betrothed as being your missing daughter. Alphie has told us all she knows of her history, and it is strange how closely it agrees with what you have just told us."

The baronet clasped his hands, as if praying that the identity thus suggested might prove to be the truth.

"Fortunately we have left her in safe hands, and where we can find her," he remarked.

thoughtfully. "But a thought strikes me. What particular business have you on hand for the next hour, Mr. Southman?"

"Nothing whatever, Sir Charles, except to wait here till you and father have discussed the proposed deal, and I will then take you back to the hotel."

"I know a measure worth two of that, my dear sir," declared the baronet, as the color began coming back to his face. "Will you kindly hurry back to the hotel and tell my wife that the name of her young guest is Alphie?"

"With pleasure, sir."

"By doing this," continued Sir Charles, "you will put them both in the way of making a thorough mutual inquiry into each other's history and something important may come of it. How long, colonel," he added, turning to his host, "shall I be detained here, do you think?"

"I should say about an hour, Sir Charles," answered Colonel Southman, "if you desire to make a thorough examination of all our abstracts, receipts, expenditures, and so on, but if you are willing to take my word for these details, your stay will be greatly shortened."

"You have heard, Mr. Southman?" said the baronet, turning to Harry again. "You may tell Lady Depworth that I shall be scarcely half an hour behind you."

"I will, sir," replied Harry, and with this he caressed his mother, nodded adieu to the colonel, and hastened from the cabin, taking his way ashore in the boat which had brought him off to the schooner, and which he had retained in waiting.

CHAPTER XLII. A LITTLE TOO LATE.

THE shock which had bereft Lady Depworth and Alphie of their senses was too joyous—too life-giving—to retain them long its prisoners.

The maiden was the first to come back to a knowledge of her surroundings, and she lost no time in lowering her ladyship's head and shoulders, which had been resting on her own, and in taking those quiet and simple measures which she had seen employed occasionally in similar cases.

She was busy with her ministrations when a sigh of unutterable gladness escaped the lips of Lady Depworth, whose eyes had opened upon her with infinite tenderness.

"My own darling daughter!" was the greeting that came to the yearning heart of Alphie.

"My own dear mother!" was the simple yet eloquent answer.

Their lips met in a long, long kiss, the arms of each encircling the other as if they would never more be separated.

Then they sat up on the sofa again, the mother pushing the hair back from the sweet face, and bestowing upon it a look of the deepest affection and admiration.

"How good it is of the Infinite Father to send you back to me in this manner, Alphie!" she exclaimed, with radiant features. "I shall never murmur again! All these years of sorrowing and yearning are as if they had never been!"

"Then you do not have the least doubt that I am your long-missing child, my dear mother?" breathed Alphie, her tearful eyes lingering upon the countenance before her as fondly as reverently.

"Not the least shadow of doubt, my daughter," answered her ladyship, in a tone of perfect conviction. "And you, darling? Tell me if your heart knows me?"

"It does indeed, mother!"

"I almost knew you at first sight," continued Lady Depworth, caressing the hand she held, "but we are all creatures of doubt and darkness, and are never willing to meet half-way the mercies heaven is ever showering upon us. Perhaps you noticed that I could hardly take my eyes from you?"

"I did, mamma, and oh! what a strange thrill of peace and gladness they sent through my whole being!"

"The truth is," explained her ladyship, "you 'date back' to my mother, and are the living image of what she was forty years ago, as you cannot fail to see at a glance when I show you her pictures. Did you notice how closely your father looked at you as you entered?"

"I did," answered Alphie, her hand closing so tightly upon her mother's arm as to pain her.

"What is it, dear?"

"It's that word 'father,'" exclaimed the girl, with tender delight. "What joy to know, after all these miserable years with the Gilfords, that I have found my own dear papa! And that's not all, mamma! I shall have my own dear Harry, and you and papa will have a dear son as well as a daughter! Oh! I believe I'm the happiest girl in the world!"

Footsteps were heard coming along the hall at this moment, in a slow and uncertain fashion, as if the person producing them was looking up some particular number, and at the end of a few moments they came to a halt at her ladyship's door and were succeeded by a knock.

"Let me see who is there, darling," proposed Lady Depworth, as both ladies started to their feet.

The door having been drawn open, the mother and daughter found under their gaze, a man of very striking appearance, whose manner at once fixed their attention.

He was in fact, no less a personage than Black Jack Yattaw.

The face of the redoubtable captain was inscrutable and full of mystery, but it could have been readily seen that he was a prey to no ordinary excitement, as he inclined himself with extreme politeness to the graceful figure in the doorway.

"Lady Depworth, no doubt?" he queried.

A nod answered him.

"Thank you, my lady. My name is Yattaw."

"Walk in, sir," invited Lady Depworth, extending her hand. "I am glad to see you. You are doubtless the husband of the lady who was here a little while ago to ask me some questions about my lost daughter?"

"I am, my lady," said Black Jack, his face flushing at his kind reception.

"Sit down, please," continued her ladyship. "It may be that I am indebted to you for a portion of the great good fortune which has come to me."

"I hope so, I'm sure," returned the bumboat, a little bewildered by her ladyship's observations, as also by the lustrous eyes Alphie had not ceased to turn upon him since his arrival. "Pardon me, my lady," he added desperately, "for blurring out in my own rude way what I have come to tell you. I've found your lost daughter!"

"You have?" cried her ladyship. "Where is she?"

"I cannot say just where she is at this moment," avowed the bumboat, "but I have no doubt I can find her in the course of the evening."

"By what name is she known, Mr. Yattaw?" asked her ladyship, becoming a little suspicious of her visitor.

"By her own name, my lady—the name of Alphie, Alphie Gilford!"

"Ah, thank you, Mr. Yattaw! I see that you are an honest man!" cried her ladyship. "Here is the object of your kindly attention, as also of my long and weary quest. Alphie, darling, this gentleman is Mr. Yattaw, a well-known citizen of Chicago, who has interested himself in you, as has his wife. Mr. Yattaw, my daughter, Alphie Depworth, who has so long been known as Alphie Gilford."

The introduction came upon the bumboat as a sort of disappointment, but he rallied promptly, and gave expression to his congratulations.

"It seems I am forestalled in the measure I had so much at heart," he concluded, "that of restoring your daughter to you, my lady, but I can at least tell you where to find your terrible enemy, Dawling Caddle?"

"You can?" cried her ladyship. "Then you will indeed do me a great favor."

"Dawling Caddle?" exclaimed Alphie. "I was trying to think of that name a few moments ago!"

"Then you have heard it before?" demanded Lady Depworth.

"Not exactly heard it, mamma," replied Alphie, "but I have seen it on a package of letters from the old country in the possession of Derby Gilford!"

"You are sure?"

"Yes, mamma!"

"And when was that?"

"A few years ago, when he was putting in order the papers in his desk," explained Alphie. "The fact did not come to my memory till now."

With a smile of intense satisfaction, Lady Depworth turned to her visitor, whose aspect and manner had undergone a marked change at the revelations.

"Does your information agree with what my daughter has told me, Mr. Yattaw?" she inquired.

"It does, my lady, I'm glad to say," replied Black Jack, gaining his feet. "I have discovered that Derby Gilford is merely another name for Dawling Caddle. His residence, your ladyship will remember, is near Muskegon, so that you can find him at any moment."

"I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Yattaw, as is my daughter, for your kind offices in this matter," said Lady Depworth, "as also for the information you have given us, although it has come a little late. I will mention your call to Sir Charles, and if you should be passing this way again he will be glad to see you."

Expressing his thanks for the invitation the bumboat took his departure.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE ON-THE-WING TO THE RESCUE.

THE satisfaction experienced by Lady Depworth at the visit of Black Jack Yattaw was not unmingled with regret.

"He seems disappointed," she could not help remarking.

"Doubtless he is, mamma, it is so nice to do any one a kindness," returned Alphie, "and Mr. Yattaw evidently intended to render you and papa a great favor."

"Another thing, darling," suggested her lady-

ship, "he may have been at no little trouble and expense to find out the facts he came here to communicate. I didn't think of this, or I would have offered to recoup him."

"Let us hope we shall see him again," said Alphie, "and if he has really incurred any expense in my behalf we'll do what is right in the matter. In the mean time, mamma, I can't help making up for lost time."

Hovering about her mother, very much in the style of a bee hovering over a flower, she infolded her in her arms, kissing and caressing her no end of times, and then conducting her back to the sofa.

It would be no easy task to narrate what passed between the mother and daughter during the next half-hour, there was such a change of subjects, such an unfolding of their lives and sentiments.

Another series of footsteps in the hall at length announced a visitor, and he proved to be Bolly Blair.

He came in with the air of a gentleman quite at his leisure, in the most faultless of raiment, with an immense bouquet of the rarest flowers which had been grouped and blended in almost kaleidoscopic beauty.

"Ah, Mr. Blair!" cried Lady Depworth, her lovely face brightening. "I was just wishing I could see you again."

"Not because there is anything wrong, I hope?" returned the On-the-Wing, handing her ladyship the bouquet, with a polite and graceful inclination.

"No, sir, but because everything is right or just as it should be."

"You have had no disagreeable visitors or intrusions?"

"Of course not."

"You've seen nothing of that missing secretary, Mr. Bullinger?"

Her ladyship shook her head, with her face half-buried in the flowers.

"You've had no scare, no alarm of any kind?"

Still another negation.

"I'm glad to hear it, I'm sure," declared Bolly Blair, with his sunniest smile. "It must really be, then, that you wanted to see me to tell me something pleasant? This is such a departure from the usual situation that I must beg of you to enlighten me with your good news as soon as possible."

"I will, sir. Alphie, my dear child, this gentleman is Bolly Blair, a famous detective. Mr. Blair, my only daughter and heiress, Alphie Depworth, whose sad history Sir Charles gave you on our arrival, when you presented yourself to us as Mr. Stark, a newspaper reporter."

"I am very delighted to meet you, Miss Depworth, I assure you," declared the On-the-Wing, shaking hands with her, "and I must also congratulate your ladyship," he added, turning to the mother, "on having found your missing child, almost before you had resumed your search for her. Isn't it strange that she has literally dropped into your hands, like a ripe pear from a tree?"

"It is more than strange, sir—it is fateful and providential," returned her ladyship, caressing her daughter anew, and handing to her the bouquet she had been so ardently admiring.

"It's another proof, my lady, that the world is really made for honest and decent people, after all, whatever the crooks may think," continued the detective, with deep feeling. "I've never seen a better demonstration of this fact than is shown in your restoration to each other."

"Such lovely flowers!" breathed Alphie, burying her nostrils in them again and again. "And here are two initials woven into them—'S. and D.'"

"That stands for South Dakota," suggested the On-the-Wing, with a jovial smile.

"No, it don't," cried Alphie, with an exquisite blush. "It stands for Southman and Depworth, and I see that you have brought the bouquet here to take the post of honor at my marriage!"

"Sure enough," admitted Blair, pressing again the hand Alphie offered him in grateful thankfulness. "I must confess to the purpose you ascribe to me, but I had my reasons for it. Events are marching on so fast hereabouts, that one must act promptly or be left out of the swim."

"Oh, that Harry and papa were here to see it!" exclaimed Alphie. "Why shouldn't we go off to the schooner to them?"

"I was just thinking of that very thing," avowed Lady Depworth—"I am so eager for papa to know that we have found you!"

As was natural, she turned an inquiring eye upon the detective.

"I approve of the suggestion," he hastened to answer. "But I hear footsteps in the hall, and they sound to me like those of Mr. Southman."

The hint was enough for Alphie.

She gained the door in a few rapid steps, and in another instant was clasped in Harry's arms.

"There! there! my child," cried the happy mother, approaching them. "You mustn't keep me from my boy so long!"

It was with a gladness almost too great for words that her ladyship drew the handsome young gentleman to her heart, kissing him, and

it is needless to say that her joy was fully shared by Harry.

"Sir Charles suspected the truth the very moment my mother pronounced your name, darling," he declared, his arm again inclosing his betrothed. "Is everything cleared up and settled between you and her ladyship already?"

"Yes, dearest!"

"She knows you are her daughter?"

"Yes, she knows it!"

"How glad father and mother will be!"

Again the young couple seemed lost to their surroundings.

"My son," said her ladyship, "let me introduce you to Mr. Blair, the chief of the On-the-Wing Detectives. Mr. Blair, my prospective son-in-law, Harry Southman."

The two gentlemen shook hands cordially, and Harry said:

"I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Blair, and hope to see you later. The presence of your On-the-Wings on the schooner is a great comfort to my mother."

"They'll be more so shortly," returned Blair, with a smile that puzzled the new-comer. "You've arrived just in time to go back to the schooner with us."

"But Sir Charles told me to say that he'll arrive here scarcely half an hour behind me."

"Nevertheless, he will not come," declared the On-the-Wing, his strange smile deepening. "Let's be off."

"We'll be ready in a moment, Mr. Blair," said Lady Depworth. "But—"

She started violently, her face turning abruptly toward the baronet's bedroom.

"What am I thinking about?" she whispered in the ear of the detective. "I cannot leave the hotel."

"Why not?" asked Blair.

"Because we have half a million in cash in that bedroom!"

"You are mistaken, my lady," returned Blair, in a tone as guarded as her own. "Fred Bullinger crept in here while you and Miss Depworth were unconscious, and got away with that money without being seen or heard."

The smile with which he accompanied these words prevented her ladyship from taking them at their literal value.

"But the cash is nevertheless perfectly safe, my lady, in a compartment of the big safe below," added the On-the-Wing, "and hence you are at liberty to turn the key and go where you please."

And in another minute the quartette were leaving the hotel behind them.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THROWING OFF HIS MASK.

SEATED at the cabin table, Sir Charles had carefully examined the papers relating to the famous Wizard Silver Mine, Colonel Southman from time to time answering his questions and giving him necessary explanations.

"The property is certainly all you have claimed it to be," at length remarked the baronet, proceeding to gather into a bundle the documents he had been examining.

"It is even better, Sir Charles," returned the colonel, "for the reason that several large items which have entered into the working expenses of the last year will not have to be repeated for a long time to come, if ever."

"And now to give me your lowest figures, colonel," pursued the baronet.

"They are precisely what I stated in my last letter, sir," said Colonel Southman.

"That is to say, one and three-quarter millions?"

"Exactly, Sir Charles. It was understood, too, you will remember, that the deal was to be for cash, and the very low price I've named was fixed with that understanding."

The baronet assented.

"Of course I could have given time for the bulk of my interest," added the colonel, "but there are a number of small holders associated with me who are anxious to have their money."

"That was all mentioned in one of your latest letters, colonel," confirmed Sir Charles, "and of course I have never talked of anything but paying cash down for the property. The price you have named covers everything—the land, the plant, ore on the dumps and in the levels, all machinery, cars, railways, smelters, and what not?"

"Everything, sir."

"In a word, for one-and-three-quarter millions you and your associates step out of the 'Wizard' and allow us to step in?" summed up the baronet, with a smile.

"That's the case exactly, sir."

"Upon these papers, then, and upon these terms," declared Sir Charles, "I will take the property. Have you made out the deeds and brought them along with you, as requested?"

"Here they are, Sir Charles," answered the colonel, producing them. "They are dated ten days ago, or at the time your call for them reached me."

"They are duly witnessed and authenticated in every way required by your laws?"

"As you will see by a glance at them," assured the colonel. "All you have to do now is to place them on record."

"Oh, yes, I have to draw my checks for the amount of the purchase money," remarked Sir Charles, with another smile, as he produced a number of check-books. "I shall make them to your order, I suppose. I do that, nobody can draw the money till your name is on the back, and you are identified, personally or otherwise?"

The colonel answered affirmatively.

"Our system in England is different," remarked the baronet, proceeding to fill out a check. "In my country, a check to order is always presumed to be in the hands of its legitimate owner, and will be cashed without any verification of either your signature or identity."

"Discouraging pleasantly of other differences between the financial methods of the two countries, Sir Charles filled out seven or eight checks rapidly for large amounts, until the aggregate sum they called for reached one and three quarter millions.

"There you are, colonel," he then said, shoving the checks across the table.

"And a good transaction I hope it will prove for both of us, Sir Charles," returned Colonel Southman, pushing toward the baronet the deeds and other papers relating to the Wizard. "I feel that I have kept my wife and son prisoners too long in that wild region, and am fully resolved that they shall get more out of life henceforth than they have been getting."

"A good idea," commented Sir Charles, proceeding to make a bundle of his papers.

"And one now all the more necessary because my son proposes to have a household of his own," added the colonel.

"That reminds me of this mysterious Alphie," said the baronet, gaining his feet with alacrity. "I must hurry back to the hotel, and see what's to be the outcome of the exciting problem her name has so suddenly presented. What if she should prove to be my lost daughter?"

"I hope she may, Sir Charles," returned Colonel Southman, "but there is little likelihood that such will prove to be the case. What we have here is a mere coincidence—one of those reminders or suggestions which thrust themselves upon us when least expected. Let her be who or what she may, however, she is a very charming, noble girl and we shall all cherish and love her always for her splendid endowments of mind and heart which no adverse fate or fortune can take from her."

"May she prove a blessing to you both, my friends, as to your son," implored the baronet, shaking hands with the colonel and Mrs. Southman. "We shall of course see you during the day at our hotel? Do not fail, and we'll arrange to have dinner together."

A promise was given him, and he was about to proceed to the deck, escorted by Colonel Southman, when quite a shock was given to the port quarter of the schooner.

"Ah, another arrival," recognized the colonel. "Sit down a moment, Sir Charles, till we see who it is."

The baronet complied, but a couple of minutes passed away without further demonstrations, although considerable movement seemed to be manifested on deck and in the fore-castle.

"Evidently it's no one to see us," said the baronet, arising again, "and I really must be going. My wife—"

He was interrupted by footsteps at the entrance of the cabin, and Dan the Swatter made his appearance.

"Ah, Mr. Blair!" greeted Colonel Southman, with visible relief, "I was just wishing you would get back to us!"

The baronet looked from the new-comer to the colonel, and then back to the Swatter, while the latter folded his arms in the most approved style of his favorite stage villain, and glared triumphantly from one to the other.

"What name was that you just pronounced, colonel?" asked Sir Charles, turning to his host.

"That of the gentleman who has just entered our presence, Sir Charles, but who seems to have taken a drop too much, or something," answered the colonel. "He's Bolly Blair, the noted chief of the On-the-Wing Detectives—"

"He's more likely an imp of the bottomless pit," interrupted Sir Charles, checking the colonel's remarks by a gesture. "I know Bolly Blair well, although only since my arrival in Chicago, and this man is not he."

"Not Bolly Blair?" cried Colonel Southman, with a surprise and alarm defying expression.

"No more than he's Peter the Great! Bolly Blair is a man of entirely different appearance from this person!"

"Then who can this person be?" inquired the colonel, thoroughly startled.

"That remains to be seen! You hear, sir?" the baronet added, with involuntary sternness, addressing the intruder. "Who are you?"

"My name is Dan Drindle," was the answer, as the speaker stepped nearer, his features and eyes glowing with infernal malignity, "but I am more commonly known as Dan the Swatter!"

CHAPTER XLV.

FROM CROOK TO PIRATE.

THE statement of the daring crook fell upon his hearers like the explosion of a bombshell.

"What! the man who carried off my three millions this morning?" cried the baronet, recoiling to the chair from which he had just arisen.

"The very same, Sir Charles," answered the Swatter, with mocking politeness. "I am delighted at making your personal acquaintance, but I hope to retain you in my hands longer than I did the three millions to which you have just alluded."

"What do you mean, rascal?" retorted Sir Charles, angrily.

"Oh, you needn't call any names here, sir," warned the intruder, his manner becoming more peremptory and menacing with every word he uttered. "Rascal and baronet are terms which have no place in this schooner. Master and prisoner have replaced them. Permit me."

He put a whistle to his lips, blowing a peculiar call upon it, in a style he had often seen displayed in current melodramas, and a number of armed men came hurrying into the cabin.

Foremost in the group were Tom Gorkle and the three seamen he had corrupted before leaving Silver Island, and behind them came Bart Wyser and Simon Gorkle.

As to the two Giffords, they had remained on the deck as watchmen and lookouts.

"There are six of us, you see, without counting myself, and two on deck, with more coming to our assistance," resumed the Swatter, by way of introducing his associates, "and we're all armed to the teeth, in perfect readiness for anybody or anything that may offer."

"Villains! what are you doing?" cried Colonel Southman, stepping toward the intruders, menacingly.

"We're taking possession of this schooner, colonel, and likewise of the silver bullion aboard of it," answered the Swatter, as his men, in obedience to a gesture, leveled their weapons at the little group behind the cabin table.

"But, don't you know that this is piracy?" demanded Colonel Southman, with increasing sternness. "Don't you know that you will all pay for this conduct with your lives?"

"We don't care for that," replied the Swatter. "We shall have to be caught before we are hanged!"

"And you, Tom Gorkle," continued the colonel, turning his gaze on the hypocritical mate! "Is this a proper return for all my kindness to you?"

"Like all other men, colonel," answered Tom, defiantly, "I am bound to make my pile, and I shall never have so good an opportunity as is now afforded me."

"But what has won you over so suddenly to this villainy?"

"Oh, there's nothing sudden about it," returned the mate. "I've been thinking this way ever since we left the mine."

"Then you've been deceiving me?"

"I won't deny it."

"And there's your brother, too—the rascal I had to discharge from my service for all sorts of bad conduct," pursued the colonel. "I would have expected such baseness from him, Tom, but not from you!"

"You had better keep a civil tongue in your head, colonel," growled Simon Gorkle, with a threatening flourish of the rifle he carried. "Mr. Drindle is here to take you down in his own fashion, and we are here to help him."

"And where's the rest of the crew, Tom—those who stood by me?" demanded the colonel.

"They're forward, sir."

"And what are they doing there?"

"As little as any man can do, being bound hand and foot, and having gags in their mouths."

Colonel Southman turned to Sir Charles, as if to ask his advice.

"There are nine of them," said the latter, "and every one of them has either a rifle or a revolver. A battle with them seems to me to be out of the question. Is there any likelihood that help will reach us from the shore?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Colonel Southman. "I was foolish enough to reject my wife's suggestion, at the moment of our arrival, to send for the real Bolly Blair, or we should not now be at the mercy of this desperate impostor."

"Unfortunately, too, I told your son I'd soon follow him to the hotel, so that no one is likely to come to our rescue at present."

The desperate situation of the two men was reflected only too clearly in their faces.

As to Mrs. Southman, who had resumed her chair at the intrusion of the plotters, she had felt quite unable to offer any suggestion, and had contented herself with watching the scene in which she was figuring.

"You may talk and you may plot," muttered the Swatter, moving still nearer, "but you'll have to do as I tell you, and what I now tell you all to do is to surrender."

"How surrender?" asked the baronet.

"Have I not said it?" returned the Swatter. "The schooner and the silver is ours, and you are our prisoners."

"To what end or intent?" demanded the baronet.

"Why, we're going to have the bullion, to begin with," explained Dan, "and then we're going to cash those checks for one and three-quarter millions. And when I tell you that Fred

Bullinger has stolen a half-million from your hotel, Sir Charles, and that I expect him here every moment with it, you will realize that we are pretty well equipped to start out on a cruise—as we propose doing—which will never bring us back to Chicago."

Another small craft was heard to come alongside, at this moment, and a profound silence reigned in the cabin until Florian Gilford appeared at the entrance, with the announcement.

"Mr. Bullinger and his party."

The amazement with which Sir Charles recognized his unworthy secretary, as the latter came stalking into his presence, followed by Hi Jenkins and Sally Rimmer, was too great at first for utterance, but he soon rallied.

"Is it true, Fred," he asked, "that you have stolen that half-million in money I drew today?"

"Quite true, sir," answered Bullinger unblushingly, feeling that the eyes of the Swatter were upon him.

"And do you know who that couple are behind you?"

"I couldn't very well help getting that knowledge, sir, since their history is in the evening papers."

"Then tell me."

"They're Hi Jenkins and his daughter, Mrs. Sally Rimmer!"

"And you are not ashamed to be seen in their company?"

"Not so long as they're content to remain in mine."

"It's true, you're now 'birds of a feather,'" commented the baronet, with keen bitterness.

"And we've 'flocked together' to such good advantage," resumed the Swatter, with a grin and insolent smile, "that we now number a dozen. You'll see, therefore—both you and the baronet, colonel—that we are masters here, and that all you have to do is to surrender at discretion. Let me add that if you make the least attempt to fight us, either of your lives will not be worth a nickel. Do you both understand me?"

The silence of an awful consternation succeeded, neither of the two friends nor Mrs. Southman seeing their way to an answer.

CHAPTER XLVI.

GETTING AWAY WITH THEIR BOOTY.

NEEDLESS to say the Swatter meant every word he had uttered. He believed that the one chance of his life was now in his hands, and had fully decided to come out of the struggle victorious or die.

The bullion, the checks, the stolen half million, and even the schooner itself, with the helpers and allies who had so strangely gathered about him—all these considerations had made him as callous to danger as if he had been in an opium-eater's delirium.

That he and those with him were not sufficiently alive to the counter-moves of the enemy, is only too apparent, but this is always and everywhere the case with men who get thoroughly possessed with their schemes, and in this case there were many circumstances which tended to produce and perpetuate their hallucination of being successful.

The schooner to run away in; the many thousand square miles of watery solitude afforded by the great lakes; the vast wilderness presented along their shores; the sheltering night around the plotters; the utter absence of the enemy—all these things, with still others of the same character, had turned the heads of the conspirators, under the pressure of their gorgeous dreams of booty, and made them little better than madmen.

The colonel and Sir Charles realized all these things only too clearly, and were keenly alive to the actual and awful peril by which they had so unexpectedly become menaced.

"It would cost them little to murder all three of us, and sink our bodies far out in the lake," whispered the baronet to Colonel Southman. "Let us be prudent."

An audible sneer came at this moment from the Swatter, who had been consulting with Bullinger and others in low tones, although his eyes had not ceased to rest upon his prisoners.

"You don't seem to have anything to say, either of you!" he mocked, his glances alternating between Sir Charles and the colonel.

"For the reason that we are too much in the minority here to have anything to say," returned the latter. "But you spoke of a voyage that you propose to take! For what are you waiting?"

"For the arrival of her ladyship and Miss Alphie, with your son!" answered the Swatter.

"Explain, sir," requested the baronet.

"I mean that I have sent a message in your name, Sir Charles, asking them to come here," explained Dan. "You wouldn't have me leave them at the hotel, and let them raise the whole town about their ears, when they find that you are missing, would you? Ah! here they come!"

Still another boat had now arrived alongside, and in a few moments more Lady Depworth came hurrying into the cabin, followed by Alphie, both of them a prey to the wildest excitement.

The first embrace of the baronet was for his wife, who threw herself into his arms, sobbing violently.

"Our daughter, Charles," she was barely able to articulate—"our Alphie!"

As brief as was the introduction, it was all-sufficient.

A single glance into the face upturned so eloquently, so pleadingly, and yet so joyfully to his, and the responsive cries of the father's heart filled the whole cabin.

He knew her as his own without need of words, or explanations!

"My daughter! my Alphie!" burst from him, as he pressed her to his heart again and again.

"The truth all came out soon after you and Harry left us, papa!" communicated her ladyship hurriedly. "The evidence is beyond all question or cavil. She's our very own, Charles—come back to us after all these years, never more to leave us!"

"All of which is very touching, no doubt," sneered the Swatter, who had rapidly exchanged a few words with the Gilfords, the father and son having followed Lady Depworth and Alphie into the cabin. "But Miss Alphie is not the only one who has come back to you after all these years! Here's an old acquaintance!"

At this announcement Derby Gilford moved toward the baronet.

Until now the villain had been more or less disguised since the arrival of Sir Charles, having slouched his hat over his eyes and turned up the collar of his coat, and he had also kept well in the background, busying himself on deck, as has been seen.

But now he strode forward, with a jubilant and sinister air, removing his hat with a jaunty flourish and a mocking inclination of his person.

"I am happy to meet you again, Sir Charles," he greeted. "Your very obedient servant, my lady!"

"Dawling Caddle!" recognized the baronet and his wife, in chorus.

"Your old friend of other days," resumed the miscreant, his face glowing with gratified malice. "Here, too, is the daughter I stole from you, and it is needless to add that she is as much in my power this moment as ever before, and that I am now the arbiter of your future and that of her ladyship into the bargain!"

"And what do you propose to do with us, Caddle?" asked Sir Charles, looking the ruffian over with about the same interest he would have taken in some new and undescribed species of monster.

"The first thing I propose to do is to assist Dan Drindle in stripping you of every pound you have in the world."

"And how will you do this?"

"We shall take you down the lakes," explained Caddle, "and bring the necessary screws to bear upon you."

"And what else are you going to do?" pursued Sir Charles, with his ear inclined to his wife, who had whispered to him a few words, which seemed to have a very bracing effect upon him, while Alphie had rendered the same service to the colonel and Mrs. Southman.

"Well, I'm going to give you a nice son-in-law," replied Caddle, turning to Florian. "Come here, my boy, and let Sir Charles see what sort of a husband I have found ready made for his charming daughter!"

Florian Gilford advanced more into view, with an air of insolence and jubilation which showed that he considered his step-father and himself the masters of the situation, with the aid of Dan the Swatter.

"So, this is the son-in-law you've chosen for me, is it?" commented the baronet, as he looked the step-son over with the same scornful glance he had bestowed upon Caddle. "I can't say that I am charmed with his appearance. Has he been a good brother to you Alphie?"

"No, papa—the worst possible."

"What are your sentiments toward him?"

"Scorn and contempt!"

Florian Gilford shook his clinched hand at the first speaker, his face flushing angrily.

"I'll see you later," he said.

"We'll see you all later," assured Dan the Swatter, with a jubilant nod of adieu to his prisoners. "In the mean time, you must allow us to attend to business."

Turning to Tom Gorkle, he added:

"You may get under way Tom, going on the starboard tack, and leaving the harbor by the southeast passage. Take two of your men with you, and be as lively as possible."

The mate hastened to obey.

"As to you, Mr. Caddle," added Dan, "you and Florian may take possession of the sloop you have been using, and follow in my wake. In the course of a couple of hours we shall be out of sight and hearing from the city, and I'll then pass Miss Alphie over to your keeping, and with her a portion of the bullion."

Nodding understandingly, the two Gilfords hastened from the cabin.

"As to you," Dan finished, turning to Bullinger, "you had better stick to your sloop, since your baggage is aboard of it, with your half million, and Mr. Jenkins and his daughter will go with you to assist you in handling it. Keep as near to us as you please; taking care

not to lose sight of us, and come alongside as soon as you see me heave to."

"But what about cashing those checks?" asked Bullinger.

"Of course nothing can be done about that till morning," answered Dan, "and we shall have ample time during the night to come to a decision. The probability is that you will go ashore in a boat with Mr. Jenkins to realize on those checks, but I can't say just what will be done till the return of my messenger, who had orders to investigate what steps, if any, have been taken in regard to the stolen half million. I needn't add that the checks can't be cashed at all if your name has been brought into publicity in connection with that very clever performance."

With a nod of assent, Bullinger left the cabin, followed by Hi Jenkins and Sally, and Bart Wyser and the Swatter, with Simon Gorkle and one sailor, were left to guard the prisoners.

"My poor boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Southman, at this moment bursting into tears. "Why don't he come?"

"If he don't appear soon, he'll evidently get left," returned the Swatter, the schooner making a movement which showed that it was getting under way. "If such should be the case, however, he'll have only himself to thank. If he had been a little sharper, or even more considerate, he would have come off with the ladies, instead of telling them he'd appear later. Ha, ha! here we go!" he added, as the schooner made a sudden lurch. "And now for a grand tour around the world, with at least a million to spend upon it!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE ON-THE-WING TAKES A HAND.

NEVER until that hour had the Swatter experienced such a delicious sense of triumph as now thrilled him.

The long battle he had been waging against Society seemed to be at last on the verge of a splendid fruition.

Henceforth he could go where he pleased and have anything he wanted. The whole world had now become his oyster, and he could open it at his leisure!

No more prisons and stripes for him!

No more detectives and policemen to poison his happiness!

As to the On-the-Wings, he thought of them now with supreme scorn and satisfaction.

At last he had got onto them! He had even got onto them in a way and to an extent which repaid him for all the trouble they had once caused him.

He had not been without anxieties and misgivings about them, to be sure, during the day and evening, but all his fears had now receded into a dim distance, and he could not resist a conviction that his grand scheme was destined to be a triumph.

As to just how far he would favor the desire of Florian Gilford to force Alphie Depworth into a union with him, or the intention of Dawling Caddle to put the screws to the baronet, as Dawling had threatened, that could all be left for the future.

Busy with these matters, he remained almost oblivious of his prisoners for a few minutes, but he was at length compelled to notice that they were not feeling at all bad over their situation, and that they seemed to be having a great deal to say among themselves.

The colonel and Sir Charles had seated themselves comfortably at one side of the cabin table, with Mrs. Southman and Lady Depworth on the other, while Alphie, in all her young beauty and radiance, had seated herself at his head, and was dividing her attention about equally to the right and the left, or between her father and mother.

And how bright, glowing, and animated she was!

No wonder the hearts of Bart Wyser and the Swatter quickened their beatings at the sight!

"I shall never consent to letting that fool Gilford have her!" muttered Wyser, under his breath. "Never!"

"No, that's an idea that'll have to be revised," returned Dan, with a snaky gleam in his eyes. "We'll talk of this thing later."

Another lurch of the schooner, which was much heavier than the preceding one, showed that she was getting out of the harbor.

"I'll take a look at things, Bart, and see how we're getting on," remarked the Swatter, turning toward the entrance. "Of course there is no absolute necessity of guarding these people, since they're not likely to throw themselves overboard, are they? Nevertheless, Bart, you may keep an eye on them."

He had scarcely withdrawn to the deck, when three shots were fired in rapid succession.

"The deuce! what can that be?" exclaimed Bart Wyser, springing to his feet in alarm, and it seemed as if two or three bounds took him from the cabin.

Thus left without a head, as without orders, the two sailors who had been left on guard hastened to follow their leaders.

As they vanished up the companionway, Bolly Blair emerged into view from the steward's pantry, in the act of stirring a pitcher of lemon-

ade, which rested on a tray, and was flanked by a number of tumblers.

"A warm night, Sir Charles, even out here on the lake," he said, with a pleasant nod which took in the whole company. "I don't know how you all feel about it, but it occurred to me that a beverage of this order would be as acceptable to you as to myself."

Placing his tray on the table, he proceeded to fill the tumblers and to pass them around, beginning with Lady Depworth and finishing with himself.

"In heaven's name, Sir Charles, who is this gentleman?" demanded Colonel Southman, suspending his tumbler of lemonade between the table and his lips.

"He's the real Bolly Blair, colonel, as a single glance ought to tell you!"

The delight and relief with which Colonel Southman and his wife greeted the new-comer, shaking hands with him, can be readily imagined.

"And Harry, Mr. Blair?" cried Alphie, her eyes riveted on the detective.

"Oh, he's only waiting to see if he has been missed at home," answered the On-the-Wing. "Didn't I tell you, as we left the hotel, that he should come safely back to you, if you would allow him to give me a little assistance? And here he comes!"

Harry was indeed seen emerging from the steward's pantry, at this moment, and Alphie hastened to meet him as excitedly as if he had just escaped from years of absence and peril.

"But, where is Captain Swopp, Mr. Blair?" asked the baronet.

"He's on the sloop with the two Gilfords," was the answer.

"And who's on the other?"

"Lieutenant Shea, the chief of detectives of the City of Chicago."

"But, what were those three shots fired on the deck for?"

"That was a signal for Shea and Swopp to seize their prey, precisely as I've seized mine."

"Then not a man of those ruffians will escape?"

"Not one, Sir Charles!"

"And has it been an easy matter for you to defeat all their schemes, Mr. Blair?" inquired the baronet, with wondering admiration.

"The easiest job of my life, Sir Charles," replied the On-the-Wing. "The truth is, the crooks were handicapped from the start. It was a first great calamity for them that Captain Swopp and I planted ourselves between you and them at the hotel."

"That's easy to see," murmured Lady Depworth.

"Another great mistake they made was not to get together and act in concert," continued the On-the-Wing. "Jenkins should have got hold of the Swatter before any action was taken, and *vice versa*. As to Bullinger, perhaps the best thing we can do is to take a suggestion from his name, and call him a bullhead."

A general laugh succeeded this expression of the On-the-Wing's contempt.

"However, as he didn't know enough to be honest, it's no wonder that he knew too little to be a successful villain," pursued the detective. "He was in his room, Sir Charles, when you called there for him, and how he watched and waited for a chance to get his hands on that half-million need not be stated. When at last he succeeded, Swopp and I quietly followed him. His first order was to Clark street bridge, and I preceded him thither. His second order was to my late residence, and again I preceded him. Thus, he took the carriage I discarded at the bridge, and I took the one he discarded. Hence the cash was constantly under cover, and I had no difficulty, with my secret entrance, duplicate keys, and all that, to recover possession of the cash immediately, as also to overhear all the plotters were doing."

"Then the crooks have had no show whatever from the very beginning of their game?" commented Colonel Southman.

"Not the slightest," assured Blair. "But that Swatter has long been a thorn in my side, and I was bound to let him commit himself in such a way in this business that he would tie himself up for many a long year to come, and he has now done it. Both Jenkins and Bullinger, too, are men to be got out of the way."

The schooner was hove to at this moment, and began rising and falling with her head to the wind.

"She's in the hands of those three men who stood by you so faithfully, colonel, and whom I found gagged and bound in the fore-castle," announced the On-the-Wing, "and so you need have no further anxieties about the craft."

A couple of jars in succession at this moment showed that the two sloops had come alongside the schooner, and like her, were drifting away, head to the wind.

"We shall now have news," remarked Bolly Blair, as a hurried trampling of feet resounded above him, accompanied by numerous orders. "Yes, here comes the lieutenant."

The next instant Lieutenant Shea appeared in the companionway, closely followed by Captain Swopp.

"The victory is ours, Mr. Blair," announced

the lieutenant, "but we've lost three of them, and the very three we wanted the most—Jenkins, Bullinger and the Swatter!"

"Why, how's that?"

"Jenkins resisted, and was shot," explained the lieutenant, "but he had life enough to throw himself overboard. As to the Swatter, he threw himself into the lake the moment he saw the schooner was falling into the hands of the enemy, and the same may be said of Bullinger. I would it were otherwise, but we have got rid of them, and that is the essential."

We need not dwell upon the further events of this narrative.

Placing the schooner in the hands of half a dozen real On-the-Wings, at its old berth, Colonel Southman and his family accompanied Sir Charles and his family to their hotel, and that the rejoicings of the whole party lasted until late into the night need not be doubted.

As to Derby Gilford, otherwise Dawling Cadde he took his reverses and apprehensions so much to heart that he sickened and died in prison before he could be brought to trial. It was reported that poison had something to do with this occurrence, but no proof was offered.

Need we narrate with what mutual delight Alphie and Harry were made one a few days after the events we have related, or with what happiness they made their bridal tour in Europe?

Sally Rimmer went back to England alone in one "greyhound" about the time Captain Swopp went home in another, and it is presumed that the captain will not fail to keep his eyes upon her.

We need not speak of the minor conspirators, such as the Gorkles. Tom himself was sent to prison, as were one or two others, but the rest were leniently treated.

Sir Charles and his wife soon returned to their beautiful home in London to fit it up anew for the reception of their daughter and her husband.

Florian Gilford has returned to his farm, where he lives in the misery and solitude he has so well merited.

As to Bolly Blair and his On-the-Wings, they are flourishing in such a way that good things may always be expected of them.

THE END.

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